

those that come to be defined as power and/or gender relationships? Note well that with the recent concern about gender in "Western" anthropology in Japan, almost no research is presently concerned with the inner experience of various men and changing status in occupational or marital roles. What, for example, is the inner plight of first sons who are still trying to function in the much diminished rural sector? What are the continuing problems of overinvestment in social roles that De Vos called role narcissism?⁵ Are there no particular difficulties apparent among youth related to the greater affluence of many families, or the sense of absentee mothers as well as fathers in homes where both parents are working? What are the present self concepts of *burakumin*, or those of Korean ancestry resident for four generations in Japan? Problem areas of concern to the Japanese themselves are not really addressed by the members who attended the conference on which this book was based. The present American-discourse-oriented volume is much too limited in scope, or theoretical/psychological depth, to claim as its title the *Japanese Sense of Self*.

Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation, and Power in Japan and Other Societies. By Joy Hendry. Oxford University Press, New York, 1993. xv, 200 pages. \$39.95.

Reviewed by
WILLIAM W. KELLY
Yale University

I suspect that we all have a few files in the back of our drawers or in the "miscellaneous" subdirectory of our computers into which we toss the occasional reference and clipping and observation that seems to fall under some loose thematic rubric, but which we otherwise can't quite place. Such files keep the desk clean and the mind stimulated, but we seldom have the confidence, or insight, needed to pattern them into a sustained argument we're willing to hold up to public scrutiny.

This is a book that takes that risk. I imagine it to have emerged from just such a file, in this case labeled "wrapping," which Hendry started when she found herself caught up in the familiar but demanding web of giving and getting presents in Japan. The objects themselves seemed ordinary enough (sugar, money, beer, fruit, towels, etc.), the social occasions were familiar if more numerous, and the exchange partners were recognizable, if unaccustomed (including new neighbors, teachers, bosses, etc.).

5. Ibid.

What was striking, to her as well as to most of us would-be participant-observers, was that which connected the objects, occasions, and relations: the protocols of presentation, including the attention to wrapping. She felt “the need to adjust our own culture-bound inclinations to unwrap, rather than focus on the wrapping itself” (p. 112). And when she did, she realized how pervasively metaphorical was wrapping across many domains of life in Japan. That is what, I like to think, prompted the file that begot the book.

The result is a work that is enormously suggestive and necessarily broad-ranging. Hendry opens with that which initially challenged her presumptions, the complicated patterns of who gives what and how. In the midst of cataloguing gift-types, wrapping styles, and materials in the opening chapters, she mines several Japanese sources for three hypotheses of the significance of wrapping politesse. Her own informants tended to believe that wrapping expresses social distance. On the other hand, a reading of the folklorist Origuchi Shinobu suggested that wrapping enhances potency; containing a space calls to mind Origuchi’s highlighting of *utsubo*, the enclosed and “empty” vessels, laden with spiritual power. And finally, Hendry cites Nukata Iwao’s insistence on wrapping as refinement. To Nukata, the proliferation of wrapping over historical time in Japan has marked the evolution of civilized manners, a hypothesis reminiscent of Norbert Elias.

From objects, Hendry proceeds to uncover a wrapping principle in other realms. Subsequent chapters address words, especially the polite wrapped language of *keigo*; body decoration, both clothing and tattooing; space and the layering of rooms and corridors in secular and religious buildings as well as the design of gardens and urban spaces; the ways in which people wrap each other in office settings and in social relations of hierarchy, protection, and dependency; and finally time as wrapping, which is to say, the staging of events as marked occasions, often layered by sequential intervals of patterned activities.

Hendry’s impressive range of examples is provocative and the context she seeks to establish with cross-cultural parallels is unusual, but the book is also maddeningly elusive. The argument within many chapters is frankly a bit difficult to follow, because the sections are frequently linked more like *renga* verses than by logical sequence. Form appears here to follow feeling. Odd for a book on wrapping. Hendry’s is intentionally unadorned with jargon. This is an admirable stance—plain speaking should not be incompatible with clear thinking and subtle analysis. However, while I may be yet another academic overly concerned with the layers of wrapping around ideas, I do miss a vocabulary and a conceptual structure that would provide rigor and coherence.

Hendry does hint tantalizingly around the outlines of such a frame-

work. At the outset, she seems uncertain that many readers will accept the correspondences she will draw, so she gently suggests that we simply imagine wrapping to be a broad metaphor (p. 1). I think she worries unnecessarily. Even we up-front, straight-ahead, never-stand-on-ceremony Americans can readily accept the analogies between wrapping an object as a present and then wrapping the present with polite linguistic formulas, with the body gestures of deference and humbleness, and with the spatio-temporal markings of a gift occasion.

It turns out, however, in her brief conclusion (pp. 171–73) that she really has something more particular in mind. Wrapping, she finally reveals, is a “structuring structure” in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense (p. 172). It is a generative prototype, a Geertzian model of and for social reality, a cultural template with different “manifestations” that reflect and reinforce one another. This is a much more powerful proposal; more precisely, however, it is a more promising set of analytical possibilities, because templates, models, prototypes, and structuring structures are hardly analytical synonyms in contemporary social theory.

The result of this rather too coy strategy is that the many of the connections in the body of the text remain plausible but unconvincing. The reader is taken only to the verge of substantive analysis. The chapter on “Japanese language as wrapping” is representative. Here Hendry shows how language, especially *keigo* polite language, can be used to lubricate and to distance; it can soften up a tense occasion and put people at ease, but it can also be an effective defense against revealing too much. Moreover, *keigo*, because it is allusive and indirect, can express consideration for another person, but because it is allusive and elaborate, it can also cut to the quick and remind people of their places. Each of these is true—and so what we really need to know is just when and how *keigo* works in what particular way for whom. This is where the chapter disappoints, and her return to the power of packaged politeness in the penultimate chapter (pp. 155–70) does little to move the question forward.

The chapter on “wrapping the body” also discloses the limitations of wrapping as metaphor. Several other volumes in the same series as Hendry’s have demonstrated that the imperatives of dress and body decoration are diverse.¹ What is at times a desire for modesty can also be a drive for attention. Dress may serve practical need or impractical display. Whatever its imperative, though, it is social communication, and its message speaks to the mutual conditioning of the conventional and the individual. Decoration is a dialectical system of representation. We adorn ourselves, our bodies, our buildings in order both to fit in and stand out.

1. See, for example, Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

And decoration is also a political economy of schemas and resources;² it is a fashion system. Fashion everywhere can selectively and simultaneously conceal and reveal, but it operates in a high-consumption late-capitalist economy to commodify desire and to objectify those overwhelmingly “feminized” bodies caught within its grasp. Wrapping is an intriguing trope for linking this with other systems of representation, but by itself it tells us little of the dialectics of decoration or the commodification of desire.³

The same may be said for the discussion of what she perceptively notes as social wrapping—“people wrapping people.” It is significant that many offices are wrapped in a way that they protect the boss with layers of subordinates at the same time as subordinates often seek to wrap themselves in “long” bosses. But by what operations does the “structuring structure” of wrapping produce this dynamic of enfoldment?

A recent example that does provide a convincing analysis of wrapping (although the author doesn't use the term) is Takie Lebra's account of the mutual constitution of dyarchic power and domestic space among the Japanese aristocratic elite.⁴ She shows that what many accounts take to be simple correspondences of front/rear, above/below, and exterior/interior are in fact distinct dualities that intersect in a multidimensional spatiotemporal grid. Thus, for example, she notes that “the lord of the house, while seated in front and thus on display face-to-face with distinguished outsiders, was also the resident of the innermost region of his household, hidden from outside” (p. 69). One-dimensional notions of a wrapped interior space, potent yet protected, simply fail to explain the doubled, “public-private” nature of aristocratic status.

Among its several lessons, Lebra's study cautions us about the difficulties of distinguishing generative, structuring principles from glib structuralist affinities. However, we are still in Hendry's debt for her imaginative and insightful sketch of a pervasive, implicit patterning of practices that demand our further attention. Future work should build on the start she has made.

2. In the sense discussed by William A. Sewell, “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (1992), pp. 1–29.

3. Two very different studies that do illuminate such matters are Dorinne Kondo, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Japanese Identity in the Fashion Industry,” in Joseph J. Tobin, ed., *Re-made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 176–203; and Liza Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

4. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, “The Spatial Layout of Hierarchy: Residential Style of the Modern Japanese Nobility,” in Takie Sugiyama Lebra, ed., *Japanese Social Organization* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 49–78.