

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

KATHERINE RUPP, *Gift-Giving in Japan: Cash, Connections, Cosmologies*. Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2003, xiii + 235 p. Index.

Gift-giving has long been an area of interest for scholars of anthropology and cultural studies, from Mauss' influential *The Gift* to reviews of the more contemporary fifth-season episode of *Buffy, The Vampire Slayer*. Rupp renews and revitalizes intellectual analyses of gift-giving in this appealing work based in modern Japan. Via her exploration of the manners, mores, and minutiae of the ways that relations with others are created, reinforced and changed, she simultaneously examines how gift-giving impels contemporary consumer demand.

The book is structured to reflect the beauty of a gift received in Japan: its ideas 'unfold' as one reads. The detailed description of gift-giving that introduces the book comprises the outer wrapping, in that the examples provide the textured patterning of the packaging that envelopes the ethnographic material within. The examples have a further practical function: to portray the subtle and complex distinctions between 'gift' and 'bribe' and the ways in which social mobility is lubricated by patronage. Two ethnographic arenas provide abundant research data, a wealthy section of Tokyo, and Warabi, a small township that once functioned as a way station on the Nakasendo, the highway between Tokyo and Kyoto. Rupp has also designed the examples to structure the analytical themes of the chapters which follow. The seasonal and life events of Warabi as a less urban environment than Tokyo are foundational to data provided in the third chapter examining rites of passage and life cycles. As a consequence, Rupp is able to frame descriptions of the usual key anthropological fare of births, betrothals, marriages and funerals, and how such events are perceived as auspicious or otherwise, with gift-giving as her crucial analytical prism.

The outer wrapping of descriptive exemplification unfolds to reveal another layer of description but accompanied by a precise analysis and a focus on the strength of relationships as a central factor in how gifts are chosen and given. Rupp anchors her description and analysis in an exploration of temporal, relational, and emotional referents and the presentation of conversations from the field. Notions of gratitude, and the ways that social hierarchy can shape when, how, and what is given are investigated, as are the perils of navigating the shoals of whether to give a self-made or store-bought gift.

Gift-giving throughout the life cycle is followed by an analysis of the importance of seasonal cycles, particularly those of Japanese year end (winter) and midyear (summer), and an meticulous description of the historical changes that have occurred to the major seasonal gift-giving events. Indeed, Rupp contends that the contemporary manifestation of the two most important gift-giving occasions accounts for an astonishing 60 percent of many department stores' annual profits.

The chapter that is devoted to describing the variations that exist in attitudes and practices of gift-giving creates resonances with Wikan's *Managing Turbulent Hearts; A Balinese Formula For Living* (1990) and Spielvogel's *Working Out In Japan* (2003) where it is clear that women are judged for the way they conduct the public responsibilities of gift-giving (whereas Wikan's research traced the public work of women in managing the 'turbulent heart' caused by grief and Spielvogel analysed how women managed their physical appearance), but that relations among men remain of key importance. Happily, Rupp does not present those who people her pages in stereotypic generalisations, but uses photographs to add a human face to her assertions and descriptions. The photographs also add complexity to the reader's knowledge by portraying the exquisite nature of the wrapping, bows, boxing, and contents of gifts, and the line drawings scattered throughout add a delightful aesthetic quality to a text that could easily have been reduced to wordy descriptions.

The latter part of the book incorporates theory to reveal the conceptual kernel of Rupp's delightful and vital work. She interweaves anthropological explanations of gift-giving in a range of cultures with conclusions drawn from her earlier presentation of Japanese gift practices within their historical framework and cultural context. She argues against essentialist, stereotypic, and static understandings of Japanese people and their giving of gifts, contending that such understandings do not help to explain the diversity and variety of forms of giving generated by her research. She proposes that 'the gift' does not stand for the giver's identity but reflects the social relationship, that is, the 'ritual efficacy' between the person who gives and the person who receives the gift.

Thorough notes and a bibliography join with a comprehensive glossary of terms to reflect the complex and scrupulous research from which this work has been drawn. The book is useful for anthropologists of modern societies, sociologists, and teachers of ritual and ceremony. It would also be a helpful gift to people in the corporate and commercial sector, who regularly travel to Japan, and who wish to understand the finer aspects and sociality of the people with whom they are building relationships.

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