

'UNDERSTANDING ENEMY CULTURES: ANALYZING THE WORK OF RUTH BENEDICT IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Ruth Benedict's influential work in "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture" (1946) and its ongoing significance within the anthropology and cross-cultural field. Benedict's innovative "culture at a distance" approach, developed during World War II, provided insight into understanding Japanese society without having to conduct direct fieldwork. Major concepts debated include the differentiation between shame and guilt cultures, the intricate web of social morality, and the two-faced concept of Japanese identity in the chrysanthemum and the sword. Benedict's research served as an influential area for post-war American policy changes concerning Japan and expanded the realm of anthropological study to include complex and industrialized societies. While conceding to the criticisms of oversimplification and methodological constraints, this paper holds that "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" was a seminal work in anthropological literature. Its long-term influence could best be seen in its backing up cultural relativism, its input in cross-cultural communication, and the demonstration of the anthropologic insights which play very important roles in international relationships. The constant debates surrounding Benedict's work really characterize the relevance of his work concerning cross-cultural understanding in our interlinked world. The constant debates surrounding Benedict's work truly characterize the relevance of his work regarding cross-cultural understanding in our interlinked world.

Keywords: Ruth Benedict, Japanese culture, anthropology, culture at a distance, shame culture, guilt culture, social obligations, cultural relativism, cross-cultural understanding, World War II

Introduction

Indeed, in the realm of anthropological thought, there are few figures as unobtrusively prominent as that of Ruth Benedict, the pioneer in psychological anthropology. This essay delves deeper into the subtle contributions of Benedict, specifically her pioneering method of disarming enemy

cultures during a period of global conflict. Her work thus serves as a guiding light as we navigate the complex landscape of human diversity, fostering cultural understanding and compassion. The early years of the 20th century saw an important shift in anthropological thought toward a more subtle understanding of cultural relativism from the stricter structures of classical cultural evolutionism (Erickson & Murphy, 1998). It was into this intellectual atmosphere that Ruth Benedict, who was mentored by Franz Boas at Columbia University, began to forge her unique perspective regarding culture and personality (Stocking, 1988).

Her approach, which eventually morphed into the "culture and personality" school of thought, aimed at connecting anthropology and psychology, acknowledging the delicate interplay between individual psyche and cultural context.

In those turbulent years of World War II, understanding "enemy cultures" was transformed from being merely an intellectual exercise into a national issue. Combining Benedict's anthropological insights with psychological understanding created new perspectives to unravel the complexities of different societies, especially those in conflict with the United States (Mandelbaum, 1975).

Built on this concept was "patterns of culture," a framework for determining the analysis of societies as units, each with its unique configuration of characteristics and values (Benedict & Barnouw, 2016). This perspective overthrew prevailing assumptions of cultural superiority and inferiority, emphasizing instead the internal coherence and logic inherent in each cultural system. Benedict's innovative methodology is perhaps most clearly illustrated in her groundbreaking work, "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture" (1946). Commissioned by the U.S. Office of War Information during World War II, this study was quite new in its departure from the dominant practices of anthropology up until then.

Since she could not conduct fieldwork in Japan due to the war, Benedict creatively used alternative sources, including literature, films, and interviews with Japanese-Americans, to paint a comprehensive picture of Japanese society (Shannon, 1995).

"The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" has been seminal on at least two accounts. It demonstrated, for the first time, the possibility of research anthropologically meaningful without the benefit of fieldwork or having set foot in a field site. In due course, this method has remade the terrain of anthropology at a distance. It applied the culture-and-personality approach to a complex, literate society well-endowed with a historical past to it. It thus expanded beyond traditional foci of anthropology on small-scale, non-Western societies (Kawashima et al., 2017).

Benedict's analysis of Japanese culture was characterized by subtlety, capturing the seeming contradictions within Japanese society-such as embodied in the juxtaposition of the delicate chrysanthemum and the samurai sword. She explored such things as "shame culture" versus

"guilt culture," hierarchy, obligation, and the emperor system with insights beyond simplistic wartime propaganda of the time (Smith, 1980).

The influence of "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" reached far beyond the academic corridors. It played a critical role in defining American policy towards post-war Japan, on the question of what to do with the emperor and how to reconstruct Japan in a cultural sense. It also shaped a broader transformation in American liberal thought that can be termed a doctrine of cultural tolerance, as encapsulated in Benedict's vision of "a world made safe for differences" (Shannon, 1995).

Yet, after some critical remark and on the passage of time, Benedict's work continues to be a subject of deliberation and reflection among scholars even today, fifty years since its release (Reflections on Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* on its Fiftieth Anniversary, 1999). The abiding significance of the work illustrates the profoundness of Benedict's perceptions and how such cross-cultural understanding continues to exist in our vastly globalized world. As we journey into the contributions of Ruth Benedict in psychological anthropology, particularly in her study of Japanese culture, we are not merely revisiting the scholarship of yesteryear. We are instead interlaced with a powerful body of thought which continues to shape our understanding of human diversity and cultural relativism, as well as the intimately interwoven relationship between individual psychology and societal norms.

Through this exploration, we aim to illuminate the lasting importance of Benedict's work in addressing the challenges of intercultural understanding in our modern, interconnected world.

Exploration of Patterns in Japanese Culture

Ruth Benedict's "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture" (1946) was a groundbreaking study in anthropology based on deep understanding of Japanese society at such an historic juncture. Commissioned by the U.S. Office of War Information during World War II, Benedict's work presented a new perspective on how to understand an "enemy" culture, which had lasting impacts both on methods in anthropology and, more broadly, on international relations.

The book's title reflects Benedict's main argument: that Japanese culture consists of a series of striking contradictions, represented by the delicate chrysanthemum and the formidable sword (Bogardus, 1947). This duality serves as a metaphor for the complexities she identified within Japanese social structures, values, and behaviors.

One of the key ideas introduced by Benedict was the differentiation between "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures" (Ackerknecht, 1947). She argued that while Western societies largely depend

on internalized guilt to guide behavior, Japanese society is more focused on external shame and the preservation of social harmony. This perspective offered a new way to comprehend Japanese social norms, hierarchies, and interpersonal dynamics.

Benedict's inquiry into Japanese patterns of obligation, or "on," added another layer to the web of social responsibilities that made up Japanese life. It explained how these obligations would run the gamut of family ties to broader societal interactions and ended with the ultimate duty to the emperor (Rademaker, 1947). This analysis helped clarify aspects of Japanese behavior which had puzzled observers from the West, particularly during wartime.

The study explored the Japanese idea of self-discipline and self-denial, known as "gaman," which Benedict identified as a key element in shaping Japanese character. She suggested that this quality, developed from a young age, played a significant role in the resilience and determination seen in Japanese society, both in times of peace and during wartime efforts (Smith, 1980).

Benedict's methodology was as groundbreaking as her findings. Because of the wartime, there was no possible way to conduct field studies on the island nation of Japan; she resorted to multiple sources, including literature, movies, and interviews with Japanese-Americans. Such method became popularly known as "culture at a distance." It exemplified how much valuable anthropological research could still be done without direct observation (Kroeber, 1947). Though "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" is subject to criticism for possible oversimplifications, on the one hand, and methodological limitations, on the other, it had a considerable impact on academic and policy discussions. The work shaped post-war American policy towards Japan into a more subtle approach to occupation and reconstruction, made contingent upon Japanese cultural patterns and values (Smith, 1980).

In addition, the research paper helped institute a new standard for anthropological work: expanding from the study of "primitive" nations to industrialized complex countries, as related to the new interest in real and even potential global conflicts of the modern era and among cultures. (Bogardus, 1947).

Thus, we can easily notice that the research by Ruth Benedict on Japanese cultural patterns in "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" does represent a watershed moment in anthropological study. By illuminating the very intricate tapestry of Japanese society, Benedict advanced our understanding of a specific culture as well as ultimately offered a template for future cross-cultural study. Her work remains incredibly relevant in an increasingly interconnected world: reminding us that amidst such interconnectedness on our planet lies deep cultural understanding and the necessary relationship to navigate through global relationships and conflicts.

Reflections on 'The Chrysanthemum and the Sword'

Ruth Benedict's "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture" (1946) pointed out some very important aspects of the Japanese society which are discussed below -

The Duality of Japanese Culture

The title of the book itself encapsulates Benedict's central thesis: that Japanese culture embodies a series of apparent contradictions, symbolized by the gentle chrysanthemum and the fierce sword. Benedict (1946) writes: "The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways" (p. 2).

This premise forms the background for Benedict's search into the seeming contradictions and paradoxes of Japanese life. Throughout the book, she explores aspects of Japanese culture that try to balance the apparent contradictions into a coherent understanding of Japanese patterns of thought and behavior. This approach was challenging stereotypes and creating a more complex view of Japanese culture (Geertz, 1973).

Shame Culture vs. Guilt Culture

One of the most influential concepts that Benedict introduced was the difference between "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures." According to her, internalized guilt reigned in Western societies as a means to regulate behavior, Japanese society more so belonged to the domain of external shame and social harmony. Benedict (1946) states:

"In anthropological studies of different cultures the line between those which rely heavily on shame and those which rely heavily on guilt draws a sharp demarcation. A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men's developing a conscience is a guilt culture by definition but a man in such a society may suffer besides from shame when he accuses himself of gaucheries which are in no way sins" (p. 222).

This model opened a new window through which Japanese social norms, hierarchies, and interpersonal relationships can be understood. It rationalized why Japanese people might care more about how other people view their actions and not as much about an individual's personal morals. This concept has been widely and considerably debated in anthropological and psychological literature since then (Creighton, 1990).

The Concept of "On" (Obligation) It was in the examination of Japanese patterns of obligation, which she termed "on," that Benedict revealed much depth about complex social responsibilities

that defined Japanese society. She explained how these obligations range from family relationships to those with broader social relations, ultimately leading to the ultimate duty owed to the emperor. Benedict (1946) writes: "The Japanese are most conscious of 'on' to the Emperor. It is limitless and eternal. It is 'as infinite as the canopy of heaven.' A Japanese can never repay this 'on' no matter what he does" (p. 98).

This analysis shed light on aspects of Japanese behavior that had often baffled Western observers, especially during wartime. The notion of "on" revealed the profound sense of duty and loyalty ingrained in Japanese culture, affecting everything from personal relationships to national policies. Later scholars have continued to investigate how this idea of obligation influences contemporary Japanese society (Lebra, 1976).

Self-Discipline and "Gaman"

The study also explored the Japanese principle of self-discipline and self-denial, referred to as "gaman," which Benedict identified as essential to the formation of Japanese character. She contended that this quality, nurtured from a young age, fostered the resilience and determination evident in Japanese society. Benedict (1946) notes: As Garioch puts it, "The Japanese have a word for this self-discipline: gaman. It means both 'to bear' and 'to persevere.' One 'bears' by not showing one's feelings and one 'perseveres' by not giving up" (p. 184).

This view on cultural militance and suppression assisted me in clarifying the very high resilience that exists within the Japanese people, not only for peaceable times but also in the trials of war. "Gaman" has since been studied upon as an important concept of experience to Japanese Americans in World War II and how it became integrated into practice within modern Japan business acts (Kitano, 1969).

Hierarchy and Social Order

Benedict paid much attention to the vertical nature of Japan society and its social consequence on interaction, both in language and conduct. She insisted that every individual should know his station in the social order and act according to this station.

Benedict (1946) states: "The Japanese have a saying that 'to know your place is to know peace.' It is a society where every man has his proper place and where a man who does not keep his proper place is a source of confusion" (p. 43).

This culture focus on hierarchy and proper positioning determined everything, from family relationships to business exchange and political structures. To the Western eye, Benedict's analysis enlightened the reader on the sophisticated web of social relationships in Japan, determined by old age, status, and relationships. Later scholars have investigated these structures

in their evolution within contemporary Japan, focusing specifically on their impact due to globalization and societal change (Nakane, 1970).

The Role of the Emperor

A significant portion of Benedict's work focused on understanding the role of the Emperor in Japanese society and psyche. She explored how the Emperor served as both a symbolic and spiritual figurehead, embodying the nation's identity and history. Benedict (1946) writes:

"The Emperor is the symbol of the people's trust in the continuity and divinity of the nation. He is the center of their faith in the uniqueness of their country and their race" (p. 30). This insight became especially useful in the post-war context, as American policymakers debated how best to approach the matter of the Emperor's status during the occupation and reconstruction of Japan. The role of the Emperor in post-war Japan has been the subject of many studies, discussing this institution's adaptation to democratic reforms while retaining its cultural importance (Bix, 2000).

Methodology and Impact

Benedict's approach in writing "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" was as revolutionary as her findings. Because of the war, she could not visit Japan for fieldwork; instead, she relied on a range of secondary sources, like books, movies, and interviews with Japanese-Americans. This approach, later termed "culture at a distance," proved that important anthropological research could still be done without direct observation (Mead & Métraux, 1953).

The influence of "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" was substantial in academic as well as policy-making circles. It would thus change post-war American policy towards Japan, not merely in terms of occupation and reconstruction but also to be more subtle about Japanese cultural patterns and values (Gorer, 1948). Moreover, it set a new standard for anthropological research in general, taking the scope of the discipline from "primitive" societies to an industrialized nation with complex society structures. The book's impact reached beyond academia, affecting public perceptions of Japan and influencing diplomatic relations for many years (Kent, 1999).

Critiques and Legacy:

While "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" has had a significant impact, it has also faced criticism. Some scholars have noted that Benedict's analysis may oversimplify or generalize aspects of Japanese culture, and others have raised concerns about the limitations of her methodology (Lummis, 2007). Critics argue that although Benedict's work was groundbreaking, it might have reinforced certain stereotypes about Japan or overlooked the diversity and complexity of its society (Ryang, 2002). Despite these criticisms, the book's enduring impact

underscores its value in contributing to cross-cultural understanding and advancing anthropological approaches. It remains a required text in anthropology, Asian studies, and cultural studies courses. The concepts Benedict raised, including the juxtaposition of shame culture and guilt culture, continue to define cross-cultural research and debate (Doi, 1973).

Conclusion

The celebration of Ruth Benedict's "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" has been unique in the history of anthropology and cross-cultural understanding. Her exploration, under the difficult conditions of wartime, of Japanese culture marked anthropological insights as potent in laying bare the complexities of a society and then going on to influence international relations. Benedict's new approach, later called "culture at a distance," made possible a whole new field of anthropological study when direct fieldwork could not be carried out. It helped during the war period and increased the scope of anthropological methods, which would determine future studies on a more complex, industrialized society (Mead & Métraux, 1953). The conceptual frameworks Benedict presented—the difference between shame and guilt cultures, the web of obligations-on, and duality represented by chrysanthemum and the sword—all presented this new view about Japanese society. They have long-lasting effects on influencing discussions even in the realms of anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies (Doi, 1973; Creighton, 1990). Benedict's work was instrumental in shaping post-war American policy towards Japan, leading to a more nuanced approach to occupation and reconstruction. By offering insights into Japanese cultural patterns and values, her analysis helped bridge the divide between two vastly different societies during a pivotal historical moment (Kent, 1999). However, it is essential to recognize the criticisms and limitations of Benedict's work. Some scholars, however, have criticized that perhaps she oversimplified or generalized a lot in her work, which saw the perpetuation of some stereotypes about Japanese culture or even hid the diversity and complexity of Japanese society. Another point of criticism was the methodology of her study, which did not allow her to go into the field for direct observation and research (Lummis, 2007; Ryang, 2002). Beyond all this, however, the long-term impact of "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" remains underlined. Still widely read and discussed in anthropology, Asian studies, cultural studies, and courses on international relations, Benedict's work presents crucial approaches to understanding cultures, based on their own terms rather than through the process of Western influence. Thus, her pioneering style continues to reverberate within our globalizing world. Ultimately, Ruth Benedict's work constitutes a foundational text and subject of ongoing debate in the profession of anthropology. It points out the need to continue, after all, into deep cultural understanding with enough critique and reflection about our methods and assumptions. In the complexities of cross-cultural interactions in the 21st century, Benedict's work is useful even while it would have us sharpen and expand our approaches to cultural analysis. The lasting impact of "The

"Chrysanthemum and the Sword" lies not only in its specific observations about Japanese culture, but in its contribution to the field of anthropology and to the practice of cross-cultural understanding. It stands as a powerful demonstration of how anthropological insights can inform policy, shape international relations, and deepen our understanding of human diversity. At the same time, the debates it has sparked serve as a reminder of the ongoing need for critical reflection in the field of anthropology and in cross-cultural studies more broadly.

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