

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA24A Anthropology
Title of case study: Challenging Cultural Stereotypes about Japanese Everyday Life
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The multi-sensory, immersive exhibition 'At Home in Japan', held at the Geffrye Museum in London in 2011, enabled Western audiences (including the public and school groups) to gain a better understanding of everyday life inside contemporary urban Japanese homes, overturning deep-rooted cultural stereotypes that continue to depict Japan as the quintessential, exotic Other. Through this exhibition, Daniels' ethnographic research has had a wide cultural and educational impact on multiple audiences, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of Japanese culture, and demonstrating the fallacy of the traditional minimalist stereotype with which it is commonly associated. The reach and significance of this impact is substantiated by the large numbers of visitors to the exhibition, the majority of whom responded extremely positively to the experience; the success of the schools' programme, community outreach workshops, curatorial tours, and study days; and the extensive enthusiastic coverage in traditional media and on the internet. Moreover, through its innovative uses of photographs and objects, the exhibition has been able to take museum practice in a new direction, encouraging in other museums similar approaches to enriching visitor experiences.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Inge Daniels' extensive ethnographic research undertaken in Japan (as University Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Oxford since 2006) covers various important topics within the anthropology of material and visual culture, including: gift exchange; the commodification of religious forms; the material culture of luck; amateur photographic practice; and the anthropology of (domestic) space and the built environment. Two aspects of Daniels' research have had particular impact on the public understanding of Japanese culture.</p> <p>1) <i>The Japanese House: Material Culture in the Modern Home</i></p> <p>In preparation for the publication of her academic monograph entitled <i>The Japanese House</i>, [Section 3: R1] Daniels undertook a year of field research in thirty urban homes in the Kansai area (Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe) during 2003, followed by a visual project carried out in the same region in 2006. This research generated a large quantity of ethnographic material, including visual and sound data, from which Daniels drew the conclusions published in the monograph and elsewhere. [R1-R6]</p> <p>Daniels' findings challenge widespread stereotypes about Japanese aesthetics by revealing the messiness and contradictions of everyday domestic life. [R1,R5,R6] This is the first academic study, based on living for a prolonged period of time with Japanese families inside their homes, to elucidate the implicit but interconnected logics of the use of space and the use of material culture within the home. <i>The Japanese House</i> shows how domestic practices change through the seasons and how they have changed over time, [R1,R5] highlighting the importance of backstage activities such as storage, cleaning, and bathing in the reproduction of social life. The book highlights the impact of post-war changes to the exterior, the layout, and the use of dwelling spaces, while paying particular attention to domestic tensions as inhabitants strive to balance the relationship between the individual and the collective, to negotiate multiple connections between the home, the community, and the state, [R1,R6] and to create beneficial alignments with spirits, ancestors, and the material world. [R1,R2] More generally, Daniels' research offers a model for studying the house worldwide that accounts for both local specificity and common, cross-cultural human experiences. [R3,R4]</p> <p>2) <i>At Home in Japan – Beyond the Minimal House</i></p> <p>This research and Daniels' previous ethnographic research in Japan (since 1996) led directly to Daniels' exhibition 'At Home in Japan – Beyond the Minimal House', held at the Geffrye Museum, London, from March 22 until August 29, 2011. In particular, the specific ethnographic material, and the visual and sound data used to produce the exhibition displays, stem from her fieldwork in Kansai in 2003 and 2006. The exhibition draws on these findings to explore how anthropologists and museum practitioners may benefit from using innovative visual methods and representations, as well as three-dimensional environments, to disseminate research results more effectively to a</p>

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wider audience.[R7]

Based on Daniels' ethnographic data the exhibit recreated a standard Japanese flat [R6] that was filled with everyday objects donated by participants in her research, while taped sounds and life-size photographs taken inside the homes studied,[R1] as well as written commentary by both Daniels and the Japanese participants, were employed to evoke what it feels like to be at home in contemporary Japan. This multi-modal approach does not treat culture and experience as text, but creates an immersive space filled with everyday goods (instead of unique iconic objects) that visitors can explore with all their senses.[R7] Thus, people could put on slippers, look inside closets, open drawers, try on clothing, sit on chairs and sofas, and generally pick up and handle any of the objects used in the exhibition. Importantly, the exhibition did not assume one mode of 'passive' learning, but, by stressing complexity and ambiguity, it challenged any totalizing view and aimed to foster a more personal, intuitive understanding, thereby empowering both the audience and those depicted.[R7]

3. References to the research (*submitted as part of REF2)

[R1]* Daniels, I. 2010. *The Japanese House: Material Culture in the Modern Home*. Berg.

[R2]* Daniels, I. 2012. 'Beneficial Bonds: Luck and The Lived Experience of Relatedness in Contemporary Japan' *Social Analysis* 56(1-2): 148-164. Special issue 'Economies of Fortune' edited by C. Humphrey & G. Da Col.

[R3]* Daniels, I. 2009a. 'The "Social Death" of Unused Gifts: Loss and Value in Contemporary Japan' *Journal of Material Culture* 14(3): 385-408.

[R4] Daniels, I. 2009b. "Dolls are Scary": What Constitutes Japanese Religious Activity?' in D. Morgan (ed.) *Religion and Material Culture: A Matter of Belief*, pp.153-170. Routledge.

[R5]* Daniels, I. 2009c. 'The Commercial and Domestic Rhythms of Japanese Consumption' in E. Shove, F. Trentmann, & R. Wilk (eds) *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: New Agendas and Directions*, pp. 262-94. Berg.

[R6] Daniels, I. 2008. 'Japanese Homes Inside Out' *Home Cultures* 5(2): 115-40.

[R7] Daniels, I. (Expected Dec. 2013). 'Museum Experiments in Living Ethnography: 'At Home in Japan' in London? Accepted by *The Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*.

Grants, Financial Support:

- 03-09/2011 Geffrye Museum Exhibition Budget (£50,000)
- 06/2010 Sasakawa Travel Fund, awarded to Daniels (£2,200)
- 06-09/2009 Japan Foundation Research Grant, awarded to Daniels (£15,000)

4. Details of the impact

Daniels drew on her original ethnographic research in Japan to develop a 2D/3D model for communicating complex anthropological knowledge to multiple audiences, in an effort to increase public understanding, awareness, and appreciation of Japanese culture.[R7] *The Japanese House* both advanced academic knowledge (see section 2) and, served as the concept and the catalogue for the exhibition.[R1] As testament to the public appeal of this book, to date 2,500 copies (210 in the Museum shop) have been sold and the book was reprinted nine months after it was first published. The exhibition (2011) had more than 12,000 visitors over six months and was accompanied by extensive school and local community outreach programmes, craft workshops, curatorial tours led by Daniels, and study days in which she participated.

Educational impact

The exhibition [R7] and its associated educational activities have directly increased public knowledge, understanding, awareness and appreciation of Japanese life and culture among individuals from a broad range of ages and backgrounds, through various school, education and community outreach programmes.

In total 235 young people attended these sessions (from 8 Primary Schools, 1 Secondary School, 1 Higher Education College, and 1 Special Educational Needs school). 374 people attended the Adult Education and Learning programme, while eleven community outreach sessions were attended by 242 participants, both adults and children. These programmes [C1, C2] supported part of the secondary school curriculum for Geography (QCA Unit 2) 'What sort of homes do people live in today?' and (QCA Unit 22) 'A contrasting locality overseas'. The Education Officer for Access and Public Programmes at the Geffrye Museum commented that it was "a great exhibition which was a joy to [design a] programme around, as it worked on many levels for various different

audiences. Not only was the content [based on the research] fascinating, but the interactive re-creation of the flat meant that people of all ages could engage with it.”[C2,C3,C4] Finally 1,478 children and 1,150 adults participated in 125 holiday creative activities. In total, 2,628 people participated in educational activities connected with this exhibition over its 6-month duration, which compares favourably with the 803, 2,402, and 1,045 people who attended the three previous temporary exhibition events (also of 6 months’ duration) in the same museum (see below for discussion of visitors’ behaviour and comments collected in a ethnographic study during the exhibition).[C5]

Museum audiences

As mentioned above, between June and August 2011, Daniels and two of her MSc students, Laura Haapio-Kirk and Rosanna Blakeley, conducted an ethnographic study of sixty visitors, who were selected at random to evaluate and collect evidence of the impact of the exhibition. Their interactions with the displays and each other were observed and recorded, and they were then interviewed.[C5]

The study found that some participants were in search of knowledge (40%), but more were driven by the pleasure of the unexpected (50%), while a minority sought inspiration for their own homes (10%). Most importantly, the study showed that the exhibition was successful in questioning preconceptions about Japan. A British woman in her 70s admitted that because of the war she held anti-Japanese sentiments but “The display of everyday normal living made me feel that Japanese people are very similar to us”, while two British women in their 20s expected Japanese homes to be “compartmentalized and ordered” but they actually found that they “looked messy and normal”. Of the 1,305 entries left in the visitors’ book, only 23 were negative, representing overall an overwhelmingly positive response.[C6]

Other comments, elicited in the ethnographic study,[C5] demonstrated that the exhibition challenged preconceived stereotypes about Japan. Typical examples were: “Fascinating. Totally different from the stereotypical image. A real eye opener” and “Excellent exhibition of contemporary Japanese people’s houses and lives. Very precise and detailed description of Japanese life. This contributes a lot to understanding Japan.” Finally, all Japanese participants (10% of total visitors) were upbeat. In the words of a Japanese man in his 30s living in London: “The exhibition shows Japanese lifestyle and not the stereotype. It is really what the Japanese are like and not just what Westerners think they are like.”[C5]

When the exhibition closed, most objects were given away in a free raffle attended by more than two hundred people and Daniels is currently conducting a follow-up ethnographic study that investigates the direct impact of some of these objects inside people’s homes in the UK. Ethnographic museums in Leiden, Stockholm, and Vancouver have expressed an interest in hosting the show. In an updated version, Daniels will make improvements suggested by visitors, such as enabling a more in-depth engagement with the underpinning research through giving visitors the opportunity to access additional information about specific objects displayed through the use of mobile phones. Most participants were positive about the interactive/immersive aspect of the exhibition. As an American in her 30s explained: “One thing I really liked was that it was extremely personal: I actually felt like I was in a Japanese film quite often.”[C7] The level of tactile interaction was influenced by people’s naturalisation into the ‘do not touch’ philosophy adopted by most museums, while the absence of clear instructions meant that many copied others and those who had visited Japan or were Japanese frequently acted as guides. In this manner the exhibition encouraged the transfer of cultural knowledge and understanding between the researchers and those attending the museum, and also between individual members of the exhibition’s audience.

Museum practitioners

To ensure that Daniels’ research was fed back to museum practitioners, in addition to publishing in the *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*,[R7] she also presented these findings at international conferences attended by curators at the British Museum (2012), the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (2013), and National Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm (2013). The effect of this on those attending is clear from a statement by the anthropologist responsible for the European exhibition collections at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka: “At Home in Japan’ offers museum practitioners a new model for facilitating more subjective, immersive visitor engagements with exhibition displays.”[C9] As confirmed by the Head of Collections and

Exhibitions at the Geffrye Museum, “Amongst the many exhibitions I have been involved in, this has been one of the most effective in taking scholarly research and making it truly accessible and engaging to a wide range of visitors, while also leaving a legacy for the future in terms of enhancing our practice.”[C8]

Media

As well as academic reviews, the exhibition had public reach through more than one hundred articles in popular print media including *The Guardian*, *The Japan Times*, the *Telegraph* (‘top five exhibitions in London’), the *Evening Standard*, and *Time Out*. The exhibition was reviewed in a range of design and interiors magazines such as *ID Magazine*, *Styles*, *Interiors*, and *Blue Print*, which stated that “At Home in Japan certainly succeeds in its mission to demystify the Japanese home and shatter our minimalist preconceptions.”[C10] Public exposure was also increased via the exhibition featuring on various blogs. Several quotes include: “The careful presentation made this a truly fascinating way to learn about Japanese domestic culture” (Culture Wars Blog, 08.07.11); “I think the exhibition fulfilled its aim completely. I felt so at home in the exhibition, and so like I was really in Japan” (Haikugirl’s Japan Blog, 17.07.2011); and “A number of strong similarities emerge in the ways people behave at home which help the sense of empathy the exhibition tries to create. The myth of minimalism [in Japan] is finally debunked” (British Council Blog.[C11]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [C1] Exhibition review in refereed journal: Teasley, S. 2012. ‘At Home in Japan’ - Exhibition Review. *Home Cultures* 9(1): 99-104. (<http://www.ingedaniels.com/exhibitions.html>)
- [C2] Letter from Education Officer for Access and Public Programmes, Geffrye Museum (held on file), confirms impact of research and exhibition on the learning of a wide variety of audiences.
- [C3] Horizon, a special needs school in Hackney, worked with Artist Matthew Larkinson and Geffrye staff during a week of creative activities that used the exhibition as inspiration: <http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/learning/special-educational-needs/horizon-partnership/>
- [C4] Special Projects for Schools: <http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/learning/schools-geffrye/special-projects-for-schools/special-projects-archive/>
- [C5] Laura Haapio-Kirk, MSc thesis Visual Anthropology, University of Oxford (09.2011), which is based on the original ethnographic data collected during the exhibition and contains quotes from visitors: http://oxford.academia.edu/LauraHaapioKirk/Papers/1094036/Thesis_At_Home_in_the_Museum
- [C6] Visitors book from the ‘At Home in Japan’ exhibition (held on file) contains quotes commenting on their experiences of the exhibition and how it affected them.
- [C7] Interview transcript and recording from museum visitor and recipient of a raffled museum object confirms her positive experience of the exhibition and discusses the direct impact of what she learned about the Japanese homes through using one of the objects in her daily home life (held on file).
- [C8] Letter from Head of Collections and Exhibitions, Geffrye Museum (held on file), confirms the impact of the exhibition on museum practice.
- [C9] Letter from Professor of Anthropology responsible for European Exhibitions at National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (held on file) confirms the impact of the exhibition on museum practice.
- [C10] *Blue Print*, July 2011, p. 79. This example has been selected from a large number of reviews from popular print and online media available at: <http://www.ingedaniels.com/exhibitions.html>
- [C11] The British Council (16.05.2011): <http://backoftheenvelope.britishcouncil.org/2011/may/16/home-japan/> This example has been selected from a large number of blog comments available at <http://www.ingedaniels.com/exhibitions.html>