The Dynamics of Museum Representation: An Investigation into the Exhibitions of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, Cowra

Clare Gillespie

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\textbf{Introduction}

In the last two decades, much attention has been paid to the political nature of museum representations, and to the development of a range of critical analyses of the museum exhibition. These changes occurred in response to a "newly found multicultural and multivocal assertiveness" (Krech, 1994: 3). As Ames states, culture and its expressions became a contested terrain as minority groups demanded self-determination and the return of their material culture (Ames, 1994: 9). As the dissatisfaction of indigenous peoples with Western interpretations were vocalised, the museum lost its status as objective and 'all-knowing'. The difficulties of cross-cultural translations of the meanings of cultural artefacts became increasingly apparent (see Cruikshank, 1995: 25).

This project will attempt a critical reading of the representations constructed of Japan in the museum exhibitions of an Australian country town. The exhibitions at Cowra's Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre represent a culture which has resisted being stripped of its power by colonialist forces, instead becoming one of the most economically powerful countries in the world today. The Japanese have a voice which is recognised by the 'Western' world, unlike the 'other' which is normally the subject of such a display. It is also a voice which is given the opportunity to speak in this exhibition. It might be assumed, therefore, that the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre will present as accurate and objective image of Japan.

My discussion of museum representations involves the frequent use of several concepts which I believe need clarification. First is the term 'culture'. Williams
identifies three broad categories of active usage for ‘culture’: describing the general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; indicating a particular way of life, for example, of a people, group or historical period; and describing the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity, for example music, literature, painting and sculpture (Williams, 1988: 90). My own use of the term in this project is a combination of the first two of William’s definitions. I define ‘culture’ as an identifiable way of life, but one which is processual rather than static. Cultural artefacts, as in Williams third definition, I have identified as ‘material culture’.

The second term, ‘traditional’, is often used to describe culture. Williams identifies ‘tradition’ as a general process of handing down, for example a cultural practice or artefact. Although it has been observed that it will therefore only take two generations to make anything ‘traditional’, the word tends towards meanings of ‘age-old’ and ideas of ceremony, duty and respect (Williams, 1988: 319). Hobsbawm also identifies the problematic nature of ‘tradition’, arguing that traditions which appear to be very old often originated relatively recently (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1). He develops the concept of an ‘invented tradition’ which creates a connection with the past, thereby justifying present-day activity.

The final concept which requires clarification for this project is that of the ‘West’. The notion of a ‘Western’ culture is subject to variable geographical and social specifications, and on occasion loses geographical reference altogether. For example,

1 Sahlins also discusses the problematic nature of definitions of culture. See M. Sahlins (1996), ‘Sentimental Pessimism’ and Ethnographic Experience: or why culture is not a disappearing object. Typescript Ms.
Japan has been described as a Western or Western-type society (Williams, 1988: 333). The term ‘Western’ has also been extended to describe free-enterprise or capitalist societies, and to exclude ‘Eastern’ concepts such as socialism and communism (Williams, 1988: 334). My definition of ‘Western’ societies for this project includes those countries which ascribed to a way of thinking which emerged from the periods of the Enlightenment and Modernism - countries, for example, in Europe, and the United States of America and Australia.

Before discussing the case study, the literature relevant to a critical analysis of the museum will be reviewed. Saussure’s (1966) work on the arbitrary nature of the sign forms the basis from which authors such as Sahlins (1981; 1987) and Dening (1995; 1996) are able to develop further analyses of Western dualities, which challenge the authority of the museum. Literature which presents examples of representations of Japan created by Western nations will be reviewed, identifying the social and political nature of these representations.

Chapter Three will discuss the research methods employed for the case study. Qualitative methods have been adopted, including questionnaires and informal interviews, in seeking information from those involved in both the creation of the centre and also its current management. The data collected through each of these methods provides support information for a detailed critique of the centre’s exhibitions. Visitor research was conducted through participant observation during a major event hosted by the centre.
Results of the case study are presented in Chapter Four. Processes at work in the creation of the centre, and the selection and display of objects are discussed in detail. The active role of the museum visitor in the representation process is also acknowledged, before conclusions are drawn.
Literature Review

A museum collection may be thought of as a cultural text, one that can be read to understand the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions that have influenced its creation, selection and display (Cannizzo, c1989: 62).

The museum is an artefact of Western culture. If we believe that the cultures of other times and other places are embodied in their objects, we must also concede that the museum represents our own. It is an institution originating in the context of Western world-views and, as such, will classify the 'other' according to Western cultural categories. A critical approach towards the museum exhibition will reveal the dichotomies of Western thought which have determined our representations of others. Only by realising and making visible the processes by which our representations are made will the museum cease to be regarded as an objective authority on the 'other'

Theoretical Perspectives

The museum has in the last two hundred years or more been regarded as a text about the 'other' not the self. It has appeared to be morally neutral (Karp, 1991: 14), providing only a space in which the cultural artefacts of others can speak for themselves. Baxandall describes the museum's appearance as one static entity representing another (Baxandall, 1991: 36). This seeming neutrality has enabled the museum to be consulted as an authority on others, mediating between groups who would not otherwise have contact (Karp, 1991: 16).
Ames (1992) argues that the transformation of the museum from purely a house of curiosities to an objective authority on culture began only when private collections began to fall into the hands of the State. Collections had remained largely a private concern until the late seventeenth century, existing as "the playthings of princes, popes, and plutocrats" (Alexander, 1979: 8). The few privileged visitors to private collections had not been expected to identify with these collections, or to accept them as anything more than the collector's view of the world. As private collections were bequeathed to the State, they became the possessions of the general public. A shift occurred in the way people interpreted the meanings of these collections. They became 'our' collections and were expected to be meaningful to us (Ames, 1992: 20-21; Cameron, 1971: 16).

In practice the museum's supposed neutrality does not exist (Karp, 1991: 14). By placing an object in the context of the museum, we sever its connection to its culture of origin. The object becomes isolated from its world (Stewart, 1984: 152-153; Alpers, 1991: 27). Our own distinctions are imposed as we describe, classify and display each artefact, assigning it a newly constructed context\(^2\). Within the museum, objects from different parts of one society or one time are displayed alongside one another as if they had always belonged together. They are placed together according to

\(^2\) Distinctions between art and artefact, for example, are not necessarily acknowledged within an object's original cultural system. Yet this distinction guides our most fundamental decisions in the museum or gallery environment. The result is confusion in museum display, as staff are unable to define clearly which classification an object should belong to. Kahn describes the creation of contexts in the museum in regards to Foucault's concept of heterotopias. See M. Kahn (1995). Heterotopic Dissonance in the Museum Representation of Pacific Island Cultures. *American Anthropologist*, 97(2): 324-338.
the decisions of museum staff, not because of any natural or inherent connection they possess.

Whilst the procedures conducted within the walls of the museum - decisions about how best to represent the 'other' - are suppressed, the museum is able to maintain its authority (Saumarez-Smith, 1989: 17). This authority, and power to define the other, is based upon the notion that the museum is objective. The assumption is made that an object, like a photograph, cannot lie (Coxall, 1991: 93). However, in its original context, the object existed within an everchanging scheme of other objects and activities through which it gained its significance. In the museum, the object is placed alongside other objects in a static display, and employed for an entirely new activity, that of representation.

As Weil states the museum cannot be purged of values. These values, however, can be made manifest (Weil, cited in Coxall, 1991: 94). It should be possible to read the museum as a text about its own creators, locating it within its social, political and economic contexts (Ames, 1992: 5). The museum can be regarded as both a window into other cultures, and a mirror to our own (Ames, 1992: 15). Macdonald proposes the same concept, arguing the museum can mirror, at least, the disciplines of the West which have influenced its creation, such as anthropology (Macdonald, 1996: 8).

However, there are problems posed by a critical approach towards the museum. For example, an analyst's reading of the museum as text must acknowledge this reading as a 'positioned' interpretation (Macdonald, 1996: 5). The analyst can no more stand
objective from their subject than can the museum curator when interpreting the ‘other’.

In addition, critical readings of the museum too often assume a conscious manipulation by exhibition curators. This is coupled with an image of the visiting public as too passive and unitary (Macdonald, 1996: 5). On the contrary, the museum visitor is a fluctuating and active dynamic in the interpretation process. So is the exhibition curator despite, perhaps, holding what they believe is a relatively objective stance; and despite having to deal with competing agendas everpresent in exhibition making (Macdonald, 1996: 5).

From what standpoint, then, will the ‘Western’ exhibition creator and exhibition analyst be working from? From what context is their knowledge drawn? Western thought is built on oppositions. Past/present, other/self, tradition/change are the examples which are perhaps most relevant to this discussion of the museum.

Within the cultures of the ‘West’, time is perceived as linear (Clifford, 1993: 61) - a perception which provides the foundation for our knowledge. In linear time, that which has passed can never again be revisited or retrieved. The past is something ‘other’ than the here and now. Our linear perception of time has inspired many a museum collection, as collectors rush to rescue and preserve cultures in the face of certain doom. Cultural change is regarded as threatening to cultural continuity, resulting in cultural loss. The processual nature of culture fails to be acknowledged.
The pressing of western technologies and practices onto the cultures of non-Western ‘others’ has been regarded as a phenomenon which no culture can survive. Societies forced to adopt the cultural practices of their colonisers were thus captured in their ‘original’ state by anthropologists before they were lost. Those societies who willingly adopted Western practices were seen to surrender their own. In each case, cultural change was placed in direct opposition to cultural continuity. Cultural effects were regarded as either continuous or discontinuous with the past (Sahlins, 1987: 144) rather than a combination of the two states.

No society would apply this opposition of change and continuity to their own culture. We regard our culture as a continuation of the cultural system of our grandparents, despite immense cultural change having occurred between their generation and our own. Yet, we do not hesitate in applying this opposition to other cultures, and often measure the cultural continuity of those cultures according to material objects alone. Japanese society, for example, is seen as divided between the traditional and the modern. Japan is often regarded as a ‘Western’ nation by non-Japanese because of the clothes the Japanese wear and the electrical appliances they own. Western technologies are seen to have been adopted by Japanese, rather than adapted to their own cultural practices, and they have subsequently been regarded as superior to other Asian nations in recognising the benefits of becoming ‘Westernised’ (Broinowski, 1996: 23-24).

It appears that we need to maintain our traditional cultural structure in order to have cultural continuity. Saussure’s (1966) work in linguistics identified that the sign appears as part of a culture’s structure. He proceeds, however, to define the sign as arbitrary. No essential or natural core exists in the sign - an essence which would allow the sign to resist change (Culler, 1985: 35-36). Rather, the sign is arbitrary and totally subject to history. Yet, Saussure also asserts that the factor which predominates
in all change is the persistence of the old subject - the principle of continuity underlies the principle of change (Saussure, 1966: 74).

Structural anthropologists assert that a continuous cultural scheme provides the categories by which new experiences are understood. Experiences acquire meaning only as they are appropriated in and through the cultural system (Boon, 1982: 6; Sahlins, 1987: xiv). However, the categories into which our experiences are filed do not follow directly from the world, a fact clearly outlined by Saussure (1966). If such categories were pre-determined by nature they would be recognised in every cultural system (Saussure, 1966: 116-117).

The work of Marshall Sahlins and Greg Dening, like that of Saussure, has questioned the dichotomies of Western thought. The two authors examine the oppositions of past and present, tradition and change, concluding that they are not in fact opposed, but coexist.

Our material culture can ‘lie’ about its origin. Dening argues that by the time the past is ‘found’ in the form of a relic it has been “highly cultivated” (Dening, 1995: 15). The significance of a happening has been made by the initial interpreter, that is the creator of the relic, and later secured by the institution which selects the relic for preservation. In these acts past and present coexist. Our present cultural system provides us with the poetics with which to read the surviving material past (Dening, 1995: 15).

The present becomes embedded in the past as happenings never before experienced are appropriated in terms of pre-existing concepts. The experience of the present is an act of interpretation, a relation between a happening (present) and a structure (past)
(Sahlins, 1981: 6; 1987: 153). It is only the relation between present and past which gives a happening significance. Significance is dependent on the existence of a structure or cultural system. The natural properties of a happening do not give it effect. Take, for example, Pratt’s (1992) account of the British explorers of the 1860s. The ‘discovery’ of Lake Tanganyika by Richard Burton is a happening of little or no significance to the area’s inhabitants who have no doubt known of the Lake’s existence for generations. The happening is only significant as it is known through the cultural system of the British. As Burton returns to England, bringing his discovery into being through physical interpretations such as texts and maps, he renders “momentously significant” a happening which is for others a “non-event” (Pratt, 1992: 201-202). It is the significance of a happening’s properties as projected from a cultural system which lend the happening effect and enable it to be termed an ‘event’ (Sahlins, 1987: 153).

 Artefacts of the ‘other’ possess a double quality. Whilst marked with the meanings of the occasion of their origin, they are translated into something else by all the presents they survive (Dening, 1996: 46). Dening refers to the surviving relics of other times and other cultures as ‘cargo’. They are items which become resignified, or gather new meaning, as they cross from the cultural system of their origin into the system in which they are rediscovered (Dening, 1996: 43).

 Through the context of their preservation, artefacts are retextualised with the inescapable values and meanings of the present. Material representations of others are selected for preservation systematically by institutions such as museums and archives. The entire material context in which they exist, and from which they drew their original significance, cannot be preserved - aspects of it are deemed insignificant and
left to be destroyed by the passage of time. As Dening argues, the past can be equally secured by the destruction of potential or realised interpretations (Dening, 1995: 22).

The museum is inseparable from this context of Western knowledge in which it was created. Yet, there remain other more localised contexts - political, social and economic - which also influence its production and its ‘reading’. Museums make statements of identity and nationality. By presenting the ‘other’ (what we are not) they define what we are. Wallis identifies the ability of exhibitions to ‘sell’ nations and establish their status within the international community (Wallis, 1994: 271). Such exhibitions are public relations exercises, and often assert or amplify conventional or stereotypical images of the nation involved according to the purpose they are serving (Wallis, 1994: 267, 271). They serve to narrow our views of the ‘other’ rather than increasing or expanding our cultural understanding (Wallis, 1994: 279).

Broinowski’s (1996) summary of Australian representations of Asia reveals our perceptions of Japan have altered according to our own social and political environment. Our representations of Japan in various media, including the visual and performing arts, literature and museum collections, are evidence of the transient nature of our ‘truths’ about the ‘other’.

In the years proceeding European arrival in Australia, Asia appeared to the West as one united force rather than a region consisting of many independent and diverse countries. Asia’s “teeming millions” were regarded as a great threat to the population of European Australians numbering only thousands or tens of thousands (Broinowski, 1996: 4, 16). Broinowski states that European Australians were concerned for the
safety of their gold, their jobs and employment conditions, and their women (Broinowski, 1996: 4).

As the Japanese were seen to adopt Western technologies, they became singled out from the ‘Asian hordes’ as an independent, and somewhat superior, Asian nation. Australian scholar James Murdoch, in 1919, predicted the Japanese nation would rise to become the ‘natural leader’ of the region because of the Japanese people's willingness to adopt Western ideas (cited in Broinowski, 1996: 24). From the beginning of the twentieth century through to 1921, Japan formed an alliance with Britain. During the First World War Australian troops sailed to Turkey and the Mediterranean under Japanese navy escort (McCormack, 1991: 16-17).

In these times of favour, Japan was represented by a ‘Mikado-land’ ideal, exemplified in Gilbert and Sullivan’s production of 1885, The Mikado (Broinowski, 1996: 41). Prosperous Australians filled their homes with fans, paper umbrellas, woodblock prints and Japanese silks (Broinowski, 1996: 27). It was an image of an ‘unspoilt’ Japan which was perpetuated by some until the eve of World War Two, when Percy Neville Barnett wrote of Japan with its

‘dainty, winning maidens in their gay kimonos, and all the simple folk unspoilt by the corroding influence of people with ways alien to their own’ (cited in Broinowski, 1996: 42).

This, despite the concerns of others expressed as early as 1904 when The Times of London commented

that it was a mistake to trivialise Japan as a nation of pretty dolls dressed in flowered silks in paper houses the size of matchboxes, when it already had a bigger navy than Britain’s in the Pacific and half a million men in arms (Broinowski, 1996: 23-24).

Images of Japan which aestheticised the harmless ‘traditional’ culture of the country removed anything which appeared to threaten the safety of Australia and the West.
Japan was again “trivialised” in Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, which was first performed in Australia in 1910 (Broinowski, 1996: 118). *Butterfly* is led to believe she can marry an American and live as an American with her husband and child in the United States. She is presented, Broinowski argues, as a “fragile art object, but also a cheap, replaceable commodity” (Broinowski, 1996: 120). In this representation of Japan even the Japanese people become works of art to be placed on show.\(^3\)

Japan’s adaptation of Western technologies to its own needs, whilst allowing it to gain status in the eyes of the West as superior to other Asian nations, reinforced its position as a threat to Australia and the West. By the late 1980s, Japan was perhaps the world’s leading economy whilst Australia remained dependent upon it for vital imports and investments (McCormack, 1991: 28; Broinowski, 1996: 83). New representations of Japan emerged in the Australian media, with images of the ‘peacetime’ invader buying up Australian properties, and the association of Japan with ‘cheap and nasty’ electronic products.

It is clear from the number of diverse representations made of Japan, that these images can be regarded as neither ‘true’ or ‘natural’. Rather they are social constructions which depend upon varying social, political and economic contexts for their definition. These contexts will certainly surface in the museum - an arena which is forced to seek approval from the State and the general public as it relies, more often than not, on the income received from these parties for its viability.

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Two Representations Reviewed

If, as Weil stated above (cited in Coxall, 1991), it is possible to make manifest the procedures present in the museum, it should also be possible to identify the processes at work in the following two exhibitions. Both are examples of Western exhibitions attempting to represent other times and cultures, and involve representations of Japan. Both challenge, deliberately or otherwise, the dichotomies of western thought discussed above.

The Last Act was developed by the National Air and Space Museum, part of America’s Smithsonian Institution. Centring on the United States bomber the Enola Gay, which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945, the exhibition aimed to place the bombing into its historical context. The developers hoped to inspire an understanding for President Truman’s decision to drop the bomb, and the consequences of this decision on Japanese and American peoples (Harwit, 1996: 157). The exhibition failed, however, to be seen by the public when it was cancelled by Congress during the final stages of preparation.

The Enola Gay has interwoven the histories of Japan and America (Harwit, 1996: xi). One nation’s history of the Second World War cannot be adequately told without the inclusion of the other. Yet, the developers, it appears were unable to achieve the balanced historical context they had aimed for. Organisations connected to the Enola Gay called for various political messages to be sent by the Museum through its exhibition: messages justifying the decision to drop the bomb, or calling for the banning of bombs, and so on. Without the Museum’s pledge to communicate their respective messages these groups refused to cooperate.

Some groups of American veterans labelled the ‘balanced’ historical context proposed by the Museum as ‘politically correct’ or ‘revisionist’. Such groups feared the exhibition would ignore or denigrate their efforts during the war (Harwit, 1996: ix-
Several Japanese organisations pledged support on the condition the exhibition promote their message of peace - concerned as they were that the exhibition could easily glorify the atomic bomb attack (Harwit, 1996: 160). The Enola Gay’s size alone would dwarf any Japanese artefacts representing the aftermath of Hiroshima (Harwit, 1996: 167). Without effective display of these artefacts their significance, and thus the significance of the bomb’s effects on generations of Japanese, could well be overlooked.

The Director of the National Air and Space Museum, Martin Harwit, acknowledged the need to consider Japanese sensitivities in order to avoid a “potentially serious international incident” (Harwit, 1996: 150). Yet it is also clear by Harwit’s (1996) own account that he treated the sensitivities of American veterans with equal respect.

What emerged most strongly from the debate surrounding The Last Act was that past could not be divorced from present. The representation of this history of the two nations hinged on present international relations, national and international politics, individuals’ experiences of the incident, and events which had occurred since the end of World War Two. In her analysis of the Enola Gay affair, Zolberg poses this question: does the present construct the past, or does the foundation of the past determine how it is constructed in the present? (Zolberg, 1996: 79). In either case, present and past coexist. Our representation of the past is not an objective or isolated process.

Oppositions of western thought are again challenged in a very different exhibition. Teen Tokyo opened at The Children’s Museum in Boston in 1992 (Bedford, 1995: 14). The exhibition did not aim to represent the past, but contemporary Japanese culture. For some years the Museum had possessed a permanent display about classical Japanese culture in the form of a recreated nineteenth century Kyoto townhouse. The Kyoto house started from the unknown or exotic and aimed to encourage perceptions
of commonality in human behaviours. The Museum realised that the exhibition inadvertently perpetuated a dated image of Japan as visitors complained “‘this is not how people live now’” (Bedford, 1995: 21-22).

*Teen Tokyo* worked in reverse - from the familiar or the universal to perceptions of the complexity of cultures (Bedford, 1995: 22). A major theme of the exhibition was the cultural borrowing and adaptation of both languages and artefacts, whilst simultaneously developing a distinct culture. Senior Project Developer, Leslie Bedford argues

the quasi-familiar facade of contemporary Tokyo both obscures and reveals the evolving but essentially non-Western world within. Or as long time observer George Field (1983) put it: ‘A New Yorker who eats sushi is no more Easternized than a Tokyoite who eats hamburgers is Westernized’ (cited in Bedford, 1995: 22).

The exhibition successfully challenges the opposition of tradition and cultural change which has appeared in Western thought.

*Teen Tokyo*, however, also reflects the processes by which our representations of cultures are adapted to suit our own cultural perceptions. In order for the exhibition to be successful, developers needed to assess how to make Japanese culture appropriate for young Americans. The inclusion of a model sumo wrestler, for example, raised debate: would the provision of a Japanese man that children were invited to ‘fight’ undermine efforts to teach cultural understanding and tolerance? A Japanese consultant working on the project dismissed such concerns as “excessive cross-cultural editing and urged presenting Japan as it is” (Bedford, 1995: 18). The sumo was eventually included in the exhibition, but the debate exposed a pertinent issue: aspects of another culture are selected for exhibition, or excluded, on the basis of our own judgements, even with the best of intentions. And our representations are created under the banner of education, implying a position of authority for the museum.
Both *The Last Act* and *Teen Tokyo* demonstrate the processes proposed by Dening and Sahlins. These exhibitions suggest that, whilst Japan has a voice which is recognised by the West, our representations of Japan are no more objective than those of an ‘other’ who is silent. Instead, it appears that Japanese collaboration on such projects merely complicates further the processes which influence display, introducing a greater number of factors for consideration.
Research Methods

It was decided that the processes at work in museum representations could best be observed by selecting a single case study. The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, Cowra, was suitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Garden presented the opportunity to observe the type of cross-cultural interaction necessary for such a study. Since the 1960s the town of Cowra has acted as a centre of Australia-Japan relations. In the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, items of Japanese culture have been removed from their original context and assigned new uses within an Australian cultural system. Secondly, the Garden is the largest of its kind in Australia, and incorporates not only botanical specimens, but items of material culture, buildings constructed in a Japanese style, and regular events and activities. Thirdly, the location of Cowra - situated only four hours drive from the researcher’s base in Albury - made the Garden reasonably accessible.

A case study discussing the subjective nature of museum representations dictated the same approach towards methodology. Qualitative research methods were employed for this study as they do not claim objectivity. Rather, such a methodology acknowledges that the researcher’s own ‘world-view’ will influence his or her assessment of events. Qualitative research acknowledges that data is not simply collected by a researcher, but produced (Dey, 1993: 15). ‘Collection’ implies an objective process, whereas are judged for their significance and classified according to the researcher’s own cultural system and agenda. Data cannot exist separate from the purposes for which they have been gathered (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992: 34).
Qualitative research does not necessitate the formulation of a strict research design or theory before commencement (Sarantakos, 1993: 12-14). Therefore, I began my research with the intent only to explore the issues exposed in the literature reviewed above. There were however particular areas which I considered would be important to my study. Thus, several questions guided my research. Firstly, what aims had been held by those who established the Garden, and are held by those who work there currently? Secondly, what factors might have influenced, or are influencing, the creation of the Garden and its current displays? For example, physical location, supporting organisations, and the personal histories of those involved could all have a potential effect. Lastly, what expectations and preconceptions were brought to the Garden by its visitors?

Questionnaires provided a direct route to answering some of these questions. A set of questions was distributed to the fifteen staff members who currently work at the Garden, to be answered voluntarily. The questionnaire asked for the respondent’s name and position before proceeding with seventeen open-ended questions. The questions aimed to determine each staff member’s opinion of the aims of the centre, their role in achieving these aims, the external support for the centre and the influence (if any) of this support on the centre’s activities and displays. Of the fifteen questionnaires distributed to staff, a total of five were completed and returned. Responses were kept in confidence. Interviews with each staff member would perhaps have resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of their opinions. This approach, however, was not available due to the restraints imposed by distance, finances and the project’s time frame.
Informal interviews, were held with selected staff members of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. I also corresponded with two individuals who had been involved in the Garden’s creation. These communications provided an important perspective on the centre’s historical background. The first individual, Mrs Barbara Bennett, was Mayor of Cowra for four years, both before and after the creation of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. The second individual, Mr A. J. Oliver, was instrumental in establishing the Garden as a Shire Councillor, and later as Mayor of the town developed further relations between Japan and Cowra. Both individuals were very keen to offer their assistance to the project. The details of those individuals who provided me with a substantial amount of information are presented in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Relation to Japanese Garden</th>
<th>Context of receiving data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Bennett</td>
<td>Mayor of Cowra 1976-80</td>
<td>general promotion</td>
<td>letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff Byron</td>
<td>Supervisor - Cultural Centre</td>
<td>current employee</td>
<td>informal interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. J. Oliver</td>
<td>former Mayor of Cowra</td>
<td>first Chairman of Japanese Garden Committee, general promotion</td>
<td>letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby Reid</td>
<td>Manager - Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre</td>
<td>current employee</td>
<td>informal interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 - Informants for the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre

The limitations of time and financial resources upon the project led me to believe that participant observation would be the most appropriate method for me to study the experiences of visitors to the centre. Sarantakos (1993) argues that there are several
advantages and disadvantages associated with participant observation. Advantages include less complicated and less time-consuming subject selection, the provision of a wide range of information collected at first-hand without relying on the reports of others, and the opportunity to complete the study in the subjects’ natural environment (Sarantakos, 1993: 231-232).

As with all research methods, observation also has disadvantages including the inability to offer data about the frequency of behaviour, exposure of data to the influences of the researcher’s selective perception and selective memory, and an inability to offer quantitative generalisations on the results (Sarantakos, 1993: 232). In addition, observation cannot provide information about past events (Sarantakos, 1993: 232). I believe this particular disadvantage has been addressed in this project through the use of the questionnaires and informal interviews outlined above, and of documentary evidence.

My observations were conducted during a Youth Forum hosted by the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre in August 1997. The Youth Forum was selected for study for several reasons: the event involved both Japanese and Australian visitors; a number of students would participate in activities in the Garden following the Forum; the event involved other observers, including a documentary film crew and local newspaper reporters, making my presence less conspicuous; and the forum was well timed to be included in the project.
Prior to attending the Forum, I visited the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre and spoke to staff members about my attendance and the planned program. Teachers supervising the Forum participants were aware of my identity as a researcher but most of the children were not, excepting those who asked me directly what I was doing. The participants were, however, aware that I was recording the event. I recorded my data in written notes and photographs. I believe the presence of my camera was not overly intrusive and did little to affect the behaviour of the participants due to the presence of several other photographers, both amateur and professional, and of a documentary film crew. A number of participants also took their own photographs.

Limited documentation was available at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, including press releases and interpretive brochures relating to past temporary exhibitions and events. Past issues of *The Cowra Guardian* provided valuable information regarding the opening of the centre, and donations made by Japanese and Australian organisations.

Finally, a detailed critique of the displays of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre proved essential. Various factors of museum display, apart from the obvious interpretive texts, have been identified as communicating meaning. Silverstone (1994) discusses the importance of an object's position in both the museum as a whole and in relation to other objects, stating “[objects] gain their meaning from their place in a display” (Silverstone, 1994: 165). Their positioning assigns them a certain level of significance.
Pearce (1992) goes further, analysing museum floor plans for ‘depth’ (defined as the space between one display unit and another) and ‘rings’ (the provision of alternative ways of moving between display units). Exhibitions with a shallow depth and low ring factor present knowledge as a well understood terrain, she argues, whilst those with a weaker structure, considerable depth and high ring factor show knowledge only as a proposition (Pearce, 1992: 139). Lighting and colour may also maximise or minimise the impact of an object, directing the visitor’s attention (Pearce, 1992: 137).

Interpretation panels also communicate meanings other than those which are overt. Information is selected so as to justify the inclusion of an object within the context of the museum. A certain aspect of the object’s history is made significant, whilst other aspects are ignored (Kopytoff, 1986: 68). Also to be observed in a critique of museum display are the accessibility of the language used to different social groups, and the use of evaluative words (Pratt, 1992: 204). The location and appearance of an interpretation panel may determine the importance with which it is regarded by the visitor (Jacobi and Poli, 1995: 53).

Each of these factors has been taken into consideration in the critique of displays at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. My ‘reading’ of these displays is not objective. My account has no doubt been influenced by the direction of my own research, as outlined above. Additional influencing factors, such as age, gender, social background, may be infinite. However, I can bring to the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre a context which is not available to the exhibitors. As Wilden argues in
his critique of liberalism, all critique must be of a higher logical order than that to which it is opposed (Wilden, 191972: xxvii).
The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, Cowra

Creation

The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre was created in Cowra in the late 1970s as part of the town’s effort to develop its unique history. During the Second World War a Prisoner of War camp had been constructed on the outskirts of Cowra. The camp housed a substantial number of Japanese and Italian nationals.

On the fifth of August 1944, in the early hours of the morning, a breakout was staged by the Japanese prisoners of the camp (Gordon, 1994: 3). The reason for the breakout seemed unclear and several theories still abound. One partial explanation still held is that the prisoners were intoxicated as a result of drinking homemade sake. Another, that the prisoners had heard rumours of a Japanese landing in Australia and were attempting to join their comrades (see Slattery, 1997: 10).

The most readily accepted theory, however, is that the breakout was a suicide bid. Gordon argues that an understanding of Japanese culture is needed to comprehend the breakout (1994: 3). An extensive study by Carr-Gregg (1978) has sought out this understanding. It appears that, for the Japanese, capture by the enemy was tantamount to death. Capture was regarded as a form of surrender and brought a shame almost incomprehensible from a Western standpoint (Carr-Gregg, 1978: 3; Gordon, 1994: 7; McCormack, 1991: 24). Many surviving Japanese prisoners of war are yet to divulge their former status to family and friends - more than fifty years after returning to Japan.
(Carr-Gregg, 1978: 4). One former prisoner of war, Masaru Moriki, describes the shame which resulted in the breakout:

‘From the moment I became a prisoner of war I was looking for ways to kill myself. It was just a feeling of utter despair that drove us to that terrible, rash action’ (cited in Gordon, 1994: 10).

Whatever the reasons behind it, the breakout at Cowra resulted in the successful escape for up to nine days of 334 Japanese prisoners, and the death of 231 Japanese and four Australians (Gordon, 1994: 3). Those Japanese who died during the incident were buried in Cowra in an area screened from view by flowering oleander trees. The incident was treated with secrecy by the Australian Government for many years. Len Whiteley, Mayor of Cowra in 1944, states:

The military contacted me later [after the breakout] and told me to remain silent. There was a complete blackout on all news and statements ... The deaths within the camp were subject to a civil coroner’s inquest under national security regulations (Reid, 1997: 13).

The secrecy with which the incident was treated contributing to a feeling of unease and guilt for the residents of Cowra, and uncertainty as to their civic identity (Gordon, 1994: 15).

The path to reconciliation between Cowra and Japan was begun, perhaps unexpectedly, by Cowra’s members of the Returned Services League (Carr-Gregg, 1978: 12). In 1948 the returned servicemen of the town, who had fought the Japanese as their enemy only a few years before, began to tend the graves of the Japanese
prisoners killed during the breakout (Marriott, c1988: 249). It was an act which marked the beginning of the development of a unique identity for the town.

In 1960, impressed with the "sensitive attitude" of Cowra's returned servicemen, the Japanese Government decided to move to Cowra the bodies of 275 Japanese killed on Australian soil during World War Two (Marriott, c1988: 249). Following this, in 1963, the Australian Government gave approval for a section of the Cowra cemetery to be ceded to the Japanese Government (Gordon, 1994: 16; Marriott, c1988: 249). Japanese architect, Shigeru Yura, was appointed by the Japanese Government to design the new cemetery which was financed by the Japanese Government and some former Japanese prisoners (Carr-Gregg, 1978: 12).

The establishment of the Japanese cemetery led to an increase in the numbers of Japanese visitors to Cowra. Visitors included government officials, businessmen, union leaders and youth groups (Carr-Gregg, 1978: 12). Mayor of Cowra at that time, Mr A. J. Oliver, recognised the importance of youth to the reconciliation process and in 1969 travelled to Japan to establish a student exchange program. The exchange program between the Seikei and Cowra High Schools began in 1970 and, as of 1997, twenty-seven students each from Japan and Cowra had participated, spending approximately one year in their host country.

The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre was established by the Cowra Tourist and Development Corporation as an additional tourist attraction for the town. Mrs Barbara Bennett, former Mayor of Cowra, explains:
The story that I have heard concerns a Tourist Officer, Mr. Peter Curruth, and a member of the Cowra Tourist and Development [Corporation] ... Mr. Don Kibbler... One is said to have remarked to the other that there was a need to give tourists and visitors to the town something to see after the Cemeteries and the P. O. W. Campsite and why not a Garden and, better still, a Japanese Garden? (Bennett, B. 1997, pers. comm., 1 September).

The aim of developing Cowra as a tourist destination was to some the primary motivation for the Garden’s creation.

Mrs Bennett, whilst asserting that the primary aim was to attract tourists to the town, states the secondary aim, of furthering cultural understanding, is becoming increasingly important as Japanese language is now offered as a subject in Australian schools (Bennett, B. 1997, pers. comm., 1 September). Some have regarded this as the primary aim for the Garden’s establishment. Mrs Libby Reid, Manager of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre, asserts that the aim of the Garden was, and still is, to “provide a symbol of reconciliation and [a] place of Japanese cultural understanding” (Reid, L. 1997, pers. comm. 20 September). Mr Oliver makes a similar assertion, listing the aims of the Garden as follows: "To develop friendship and goodwill with Japan and to learn more of their history and culture and to establish a scenic and tourist attraction for Cowra" (Oliver, A. J. 1997, pers. comm., 23 September).
Reconciliation may not have been the primary motivation for establishing the Garden.
However, the Garden has been included as part of the reconciliation process since the
time of its opening. An official visit to Cowra most often includes a visit to the War
Cemetery, the Prisoner of War Campsite, and the Japanese Garden and Cultural
Centre. On the day of the Garden’s opening the official party first attended a wreath
laying ceremony at the War Cemetery (Cowra Guardian, 1979: 1). Issues of the
Cowra Guardian present evidence that this practice continued as groups from Japan,
including journalists, students, travel agents and members of the Imperial family,
visited Cowra over the two decades since the centre was established.

Most recently, a Youth Forum organised by the Manager of the Japanese Garden and
Cultural Centre, Mrs Libby Reid, reasserted the role of the centre in this reconciliation
process. Students attending the Forum visited each of the above-mentioned sites, and
the World Peace Bell in the town’s centre. The Forum program outlines the aim of
this tour:

To actually see the places of history, rather than read about them, we
believe, will bring the story to reality and actuality (Reid, 1997: 3).

Following the tour, students attended the Forum to discuss the history and future of
Japan-Australia relations, and participate in activities.

The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre is now also physically linked to the War
Cemetery and Campsite by Sakura Avenue. Since 1988, hundreds of flowering cherry
trees, varying in shape, size and colour, have been planted along the five kilometre
length of road. The variety of trees ensures a lengthy flowering season and a clear
visual path connecting the sites. The trees are the basis of Cowra’s annual Cherry Blossom Festival, *Sakura Matsuri*, which is celebrated in October with activities and events held in the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre (Reid, 1997: 6).

The development of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre extended cooperation between Australia and Japan as organisation and individuals from both countries offered support. As stated above, the idea for the centre was developed by the Cowra Tourist and Development Corporation. However, the development could only proceed because of the financial support offered to the Corporation by the Japanese, Australian and New South Wales Governments, the Japan-Australia Society and the Japan-Australia Business Co-operation Committee (Oliver, A. J. 1997, pers. comm., 23 September).

Financial support continued after the centre’s opening, and contributed greatly to the building of the second stage of the centre. Additions made in the second stage of development included a bonsai house, a traditional Japanese house, a second lake and a restaurant (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 25 August). The Tokyo Metropolitan Government contributed a large amount to this stage and their support is acknowledged by a plaque displayed in the Garden. The Cultural Centre was also extended in the second stage of development due to the large number of objects which had been donated for display by Japan’s Electric Power Companies, the Japan-Australia Society and other organisations and individuals from both Japan and Australia.
Selection

The collection of material culture at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre relies solely on donations by members of the public. The centre's collection policy specifies that items must be accepted as a gift and not be accepted on loan unless strict agreements are made. The borrowing of items may cause difficulties, for example, if conservation work on the object is necessary, requiring the centre to invest money in the item which may later be returned to the lender (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June).

Selection of objects for the collection is made by the donors of the objects, most of whom are Japanese, rather than the staff of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. Each of Japan's nine Electric Power Companies, for example, has selected an object for donation to the collection. The objects chosen are representative of traditional Japanese arts and crafts, or are well known symbols of Japan. The Hokkaido Electric Power Company donated a wood carving of a black bear hunting for salmon. The object represents the traditions of wood carving and fishing practiced by the Ainu (Japan's indigenous population) who now live largely in Hokkaido (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 25 August). Other objects donated by the Electric Power Companies include examples of ironwork and lacquer-work, a hanging scroll, vases, and a model of the Torii Gate at Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima (Cowra Guardian, 1982: 1, 3).

Items from the collection are selected for display by the staff of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre if they are of traditional or contemporary Japanese use (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June). Hence, some objects belonging to the collection are
deemed unsuitable for display. One example is a set of wooden goblets held in the
collection. This set demonstrates the Japanese craft of lacquer-work, but this lacquer-
work has been applied to a ‘non-traditional’ item simply to cater for the tourist
market. It is not an object which would often be purchased by Japanese for their own
use (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June).

The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre presents a range of activities at special
events, such as Sakura Matsuri, and for visiting school groups. Examples of activities
offered at the Garden include tea ceremonies, art and craft demonstrations and martial
arts demonstrations. The Youth Forum held in August 1997 and hosted by the
Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre enabled students to participate in origami and
Japanese Bon dancing. Some Forum participants revisited the Garden the following
day to witness a food demonstration and hear presentations by the centre’s staff in the
Cultural Centre and the bonsai house. These students were also given the opportunity
to fly kites - an activity popular in celebrating Japan’s Children’s Day.

Active management in the past five years has seen the development of a more
structured program for student groups (Reid, L. 1997, pers. comm., 20 September).
Activities are selected for inclusion by the Australian staff of the centre. Certain
activities are, however, dependent on the availability of knowledgeable volunteers to
conduct them - the tea ceremonies are one example.

Temporary exhibitions and special events are held regularly, and are selected on the
basis of their connection to Japan or to the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre
(Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June). Exhibitions and events held since 1995 have included a Shakuhachi (Japanese wind instrument) performance, a pottery workshop held by Malcolm Greenwood (whose work is influenced by Japanese potter, Makoto Yabe), the official launch of Zillah William’s book *Yesterday’s Enemy - Tomadachi*, an exhibition by botanical artist Jennifer Ephraim (commissioned for a series of prints depicting the Japanese Garden), and an Ikebana Bonsai workshop. For some events, the reason for their selection is not immediately obvious. The porcelain art exhibition by Joan Bolton is one example. The artist was not selected because of any connection to Japan, but because her art is available through the centre’s souvenir shop.

**Display**

The Cultural Centre is located near the entrance to the Japanese Garden, close to the souvenir shop and restaurant. Objects selected from the collection for display are placed in three rooms of the building which has been built in a ‘traditional’ Japanese style (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 25 August). Exterior features of this building are similar to others in the grounds, and include an absence of roof guttering, and pebble paths which act as drains catching water from the roof (Figure 4.1). The interior of the building also has a ‘traditional’ feel, featuring large windows, one of which is screened, with dark frames contrasted by the stark white walls.

Through the windows of the Cultural Centre a pebble garden is visible. The garden features several large rocks representing the islands of Japan, around which the pebbles are raked to represent the waves around each island. The neatness and order of
the garden is reflected in the display of objects which are positioned as art objects around the uncluttered rooms.

The first room of the Cultural Centre is the site of any temporary exhibitions installed in the centre. Between exhibitions the room is filled with items which are easily removed. Items are also selected for display in Room One for their easily recognisable status as Japanese (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June). Objects displayed here during the Youth Forum included Japanese sandals, drums and martial arts equipment (Figure 4.2). Other exhibits included images of Mount Fuji, a model and photograph of the Torii Gate in Hiroshima, kites, and packages of sake and other food items (Figure 4.3). Room One also has a small library holding reference material available to the public, and audio-visual equipment.

Rooms Two and Three house the more permanent displays of material culture, although, where possible objects are rotated for preventive conservation purposes. At the entrance to Room Two the visitor is presented with a variety of Japanese dolls. Dominant in the room are the largest objects - five large Nanga paintings and a kimono. With the positioning of these dominant objects directly opposite the room’s entrance, the visitor tends to make their way immediately to this side of the room, ignoring the dolls and wood carving (described above) which are situated in the darker corner to the visitors’ left. Close to these objects are ironwork examples, scrolls, models of 'traditional' Japanese buildings, and items representing Kabuki theatre (Figure 4.4).
Room Three features a strikingly large porcelain vase, marked with the emblem of the Imperial family. Two ceremonial kimonos also dominate the room due to their size, position and bright colours (Figure 4.5). Pottery, scrolls, numerous dolls, and samurai equipment are also exhibited (Figure 4.6).

Objects are generally displayed in glass cases which are dotted around the room, and which line the walls in Room Three. Objects are displayed according to type, with ceramics, iron work, sandals, martial arts equipment, and so on, grouped into individual units (see Figures 4.2 - 4.4). The ordering of the display in this manner reflects the aims behind the exhibition. Emphasis is placed on each item's status as an aspect of Japanese culture, rather than on the object's individual 'biography' (see Kopytoff, 1986: 66-68).

Interpretation panels are supplied in English for most objects. Again, this reflects the aims of the display, reducing the significance of the objects' individual history, and emphasising their status as simply something 'Japanese'. It is assumed that each object's significance as Japanese will already be known by Japanese visitors, and thus will only need interpretation in English.

Interpretation is kept to a minimum, and presented in a manner unobtrusive to the objects on display (small writing presented in a small layout). Interpretation panels are not immediately obvious, for example in the displays featured in Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. The management of the centre has decided against including digital or interactive interpretation devices, as such devices would not fit into the overall impression of the
rooms and would risk becoming the central focus of the exhibit, detracting from the objects (Reid, L. 1997, pers. comm., 25 August). The amount of information presented in the object labels has increased since the Cultural Centre first opened (Reid, L. 1997, pers. comm., 20 September). However, in many cases acknowledgment of the donor appears to be more significant than the history of the object.

Both the objects and the interpretation panels are lit only by natural light, and by fluorescent lights within the glass cases and on the ceiling. No spotlighting is available which, combined with the small layout of the interpretation panels, makes some items difficult to read and view.
Figure 4.1 - Architectural features of buildings in the Japanese Garden

Figure 4.2 - Drums, sandals and martial arts equipment displayed in Room One
Figure 4.3 - Assorted objects displayed in Room One

Figure 4.4 - Nanga paintings and kimono displayed in Room Two
Figure 4.5 - Ceremonial kimono displayed in Room Three

Figure 4.6 - Assorted objects displayed in Room Three
The Visitor

The processes effecting representations of others also include the ways in which these representations are accepted. The museum visitor is a variable in the interpretation process. As Silverstone states:

The meaning of an object continues in the imaginative work of the visitor who brings to it his or her own agenda, experiences and feelings.

(Silverstone, 1994: 164).

Each visitor constructs their own messages from the information supplied by the exhibition’s creator. They are not simply accepting information passively and uncritically (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991: 52).

Two distinctive groups are frequent visitors to the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. Coach tours catering largely for senior citizens stop regularly at the Garden, particularly during Autumn and Spring (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June). School groups form the second major category of visitor. Additional visitor groups include younger couples with children which frequent the Garden during school holidays and weekends. The Garden also receives a substantial number of visitors from Japan (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June).

It may be assumed that each of these visitor groups, as well as each individual visitor, will bring to the centre a different scope of knowledge about Japan, and Japan-Australia relations. Australian school children have had greater access to Japanese language classes in recent years than ever before. They are also exposed to Japanese culture through exchange visits such as those established at the Cowra High School.
Knowledge about Japan-Australia relations during the Second World War will differ, as school children now learn from history texts that which many older visitors experienced personally. Japanese and non-Japanese visitors will possess varying levels of knowledge about Japanese culture.

Each visitor will also hold different expectations of the centre. Schiele (1995) argues that many museum visitors will have a representation of an exhibition in mind before visiting. Comments or criticisms heard from those who have visited, promotional materials, and so on, may construct an analytical framework for their perceptions when they later visit the museum in question (Schiele, 1995: 40).

For the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre such materials may include newspaper articles, and promotional flyers and brochures. The Cowra District Visitors Guide, for example, offers the Garden as an “Escape ... forever glorious, always beautiful, so pleasing for the eyes and the mind, a tranquil place for reflection, where everything has a meaning” (*Cowra: the great escape*, n.d.: 12) A promotional leaflet distributed by the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre asserts the Garden’s place in the reconciliation process by offering a short history of Cowra-Japan relations and the visible sites of these relations - the Prisoner of War campsite, the cemetery and the World Peace Bell (*Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre Cowra*, n.d.).

A contrasting framework is supplied to the potential visitor by a recent article located in a national newspaper. The article acknowledges the ‘spirit of reconciliation’ between Australia and Japan which has been given “architectural expression” in
Cowra’s Japanese Garden. The article proceeds to describe the internal conflict between Australians which this spirit of reconciliation has caused, as Cowra soldiers fight to be recognised by the Australian Government for their efforts during the breakout in 1944 (Slattery, 1997: 10).

A staff member of the centre, in response to the questionnaire, explains that a variety of responses are received from visitors to the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. Visitors describe their experiences of the displays as different or strange, pleasant, interesting, beneficial or educational. These varying responses can perhaps be taken as evidence of the visitors’ diverse expectations and range of knowledge.

I was able to observe the activities of two visitor groups during the Youth Forum, firstly the students participating in the Forum, and secondly older visitors who were visiting for reasons other than the Forum. Students participating in the Youth Forum were given a guided tour of the Cultural Centre, with detailed commentary on selected objects, before being allowed to look through the Centre at their own pace. My observations of the students’ activities revealed that the students merely glanced at the objects’ interpretation panels. They looked at some of the objects on display, but only very briefly. Those objects which did not immediately attract their attention - for example, those in badly lit corners of the rooms - were ignored.

In contrast, older visitors who were not participating in the Forum, spent a greater amount of time in the Cultural Centre. They appeared to make more effort to view everything which was on display, stopping at least for short time to read the
interpetive materials. These visitors were not given a guided tour by staff of the centre.

**Discussion**

Aspects of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre’s past have had an impact on the present selection and display of artefacts of Japanese culture located in the centre. Firstly, the centre has been used as an instrument in the reconciliation process between Japan and Australia since its opening in 1979. The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre aims to promote cultural understanding, in an effort to avoid intercultural conflict, by offering visitors the opportunity to learn about Japanese culture. In selecting only items of ‘traditional’ Japanese culture for inclusion, the exhibition differs greatly from Teen Tokyo (discussed in Chapter Two), an exhibition which claims the same objectives. A major theme for Teen Tokyo was that of cultural borrowing and adaptation (Bedford, 1995: 24). Exhibitors aimed to display, not only differences, but also similarities between Japanese and ‘Western’ societies.

In contrast, evidence of cultural borrowing is noticeably absent from the exhibition at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. There is no evidence of an industrialised Japan. Included are only items which are unique to Japanese culture. Both the Japanese Garden and Teen Tokyo aim to promote cultural understanding, but attempt this in very different ways.

One influential difference between the two exhibitions is the level of involvement of Japanese and non-Japanese in the exhibitions’ creation. Teen Tokyo claimed to work
as a "genuine international collaboration", with Japanese and Americans working cooperatively towards the development of an exhibition that would work for both Japanese and American visitors (Bedford, 1995: 27). The levels of collaboration between Japanese and Australian interests differs at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. The displays in the Cultural Centre have been designed and installed by the Australian staff of the centre. However, these staff are dependent on the selections made by the objects' donors, most of whom are Japanese. The staff are, therefore, somewhat limited in the aspects of Japanese culture they are able to present.

In addition, Japanese nationalism has clearly influenced the construction of images at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre. The objects which have been selected to represent Japanese culture in the Cultural Centre promote an image of a homogenised Japan. Japan's minority groups - the Ainu, Burakumin, and Japanese of Korean descent - are largely excluded from the display. Only the Ainu are referred to - represented in the wood carving donated by the Hokkaido Electric Power Company. They are presented, however, as no different from any other Japanese.

This idea of Japan as a 'classless' society has appeared in the *Nihonjinron* - literature which attempts to explain the Japanese national character (Sugimoto and Mouer, 1982: 10; Yoshino, 1992: 7). By its very definition, the *Nihonjinron* promotes the concept that there exists such a thing as one national character. The literature promotes ideas of a 'group model' society in which harmony exists on an individual, intragroup and intergroup level (Sugimoto, 1997: 3). In fact, Japanese society is more
diversified and multicultural than foreigners are led to believe\(^4\). Sugimoto describes Japan as a “multi-subcultural society” (Sugimoto, 1997: 5).

The selection only of objects which are unique to Japanese culture reflects the development of a Japanese nationalism in reaction to the ‘opening’ of Japan to the Western world. Nationalism involves the identification of a distinct community with distinct characteristics (Yoshino, 1992: 6), and in this Japan is not alone. Faced with the prospect of colonialism which had faced so many other non-Western countries during the period of British Imperialism, Japan strengthened its national identity against this threat (Yoshino, 1992: 186-187). An image of uniqueness marked the symbolic boundary between Japan and the West (Yoshino, 1992: 186).

Although there are aspects which have obviously been excluded from the representation of Japanese culture in this exhibition, the staff of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre do not actively collect in order to redress this imbalance. This may perhaps be contributed to the status of the centre as an instrument of the reconciliation process. As McCormack states, in recent years it has become possible for the first time to speak of an Australian dependence on Japan (McCormack, 1991: 28). Australia relies on its position as an off-shore manufacturing base for Japanese industry, whilst Japanese investment and tourism assist in sustaining the Australian economy (McCormack, 1991: 29). As part of the reconciliation process between Japan and Australia, the staff of the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre wish to maintain

and expand their good relations with the Japanese. This is to the advantage of not only the centre, but also Australian business and industry.

Looking beyond the contemporary politics of Japan-Australia relations, the exhibition of objects at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre reflects a certain definition of culture. This may also explain why the staff of the centre do not actively collect additional objects. The Western oppositions of cultural continuity and change, identified by authors such as Sahlin and Dening, can again be discovered in the Cultural Centre’s exhibits. The ‘real’ Japanese culture is regarded as one of kimonos, sandals, martial arts and fine crafts - traditions which have been in existence for hundreds or thousands of years. The culture of industrialisation, although experienced by several generations of Japanese people, is still regarded as a western culture.

Despite the identification of the above influences, the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre maintains a sense of authority as an accurate representation. The design of the Garden by Japanese landscape architect, Ken Nakajima, enables the staff of the centre to describe the Garden as ‘authentically’ Japanese (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 25 August). This is also true for the Cultural Centre, in which the selection of objects representing Japan is completed by Japanese donors. The exclusion of so-called ‘Western’ cultural elements has been executed by the Japanese themselves. Yet, the involvement of Japanese in the creation of the centre authorises the constructed images as true and accurate.
If we regard culture as processual rather than static we are able to reconcile the oppositions of change and continuity, and thus accept the so called ‘Western’ elements of Japanese culture as genuinely Japanese. Yoshida argues that the processes of introduction and assimilation of Western cultural elements “have added innovative and positive dimensions to existing traditions” (Yoshida, 1997: 3). ‘Non-Western’ cultures, such as Japan, adapt elements of Western culture to their own cultural system, adding influences which make these new traditions unique, and unquestionably their own.
Conclusion

A critical reading of the exhibitions at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre has revealed the many processes, past and present, which continue to influence the representations made in this museum. The images constructed in the Cultural Centre result from a collaboration between Japanese and Australian interests - a factor which increases the centre's sense of authority, yet complicates the representation process further.

Aspects of Cowra's history have influenced the Cultural Centre's image-making. The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre is firmly located in Cowra's reconciliation movement, which began in the late 1940s. The centre cannot escape its role in this movement. The Garden relies on expanding good relations with Japanese visitors and investors for its own income.

The selection of objects for inclusion in the centre's collection is also subject to the influence of Japanese nationalisms. As discussed in Chapter Four, the image created by this collection is one which can also be identified in the *Nihonjinron* - literature regarding the Japanese national character. The displays at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre promote an image of a classless and homogenous Japan, despite the discrimination in this country of groups such as the Ainu, Burakumin and Japanese of Korean descent. The image of a homogenous and unified Japan, possessing a unique culture, strengthens Japanese national identity in its dealings with the international community.
In addition, the representations of Japan in the Cultural Centre reflect a particular concept of culture. As is common in Western representations of the ‘other’, cultural change is regarded as cultural loss in this exhibition. Technologies and cultural practices adapted from the ‘West’ are excluded from the display, revealing the creator’s opinion that these elements are not truly Japanese. The display of objects as art, categorised into units according to their appearance, aestheticises Japanese culture.

Despite the influences of each of these processes, the displays at the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre maintain their authority. The involvement of Japanese architects and landscape gardeners, and the role of the Japanese in the selection of objects which represent their culture, lend the representations of the centre ‘authenticity’. Japanese support for the centre allows these images of Japan to appear as more accurate and true than if Japanese people had been excluded from the representation process.

These factors behind the centre’s representations cannot be removed so as to make the images objective. Kahn suggests that museums might best serve their educational mission by becoming facilitators, providing the space and technical expertise for others to use for their own exhibitions where they can choose the material, set the agenda, write the script, arrange the programs, and veto interference (Kahn, 1995: 336).

Kahn’s statement relies on the notion of a homogenous cultural group, and assumes that in this way a ‘truer’ representation can be achieved. Yet, the analysis of the
Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre has revealed internal politics within Japan which result in the production of images which exclude certain Japanese identities.

Self-representation will not exclude the values and ideologies which lie behind the museum exhibition, as only a few individuals can be chosen to represent to whole of Japan. There are, however, ways in which to make the influential processes more visible to the visitor. Firstly, the respective levels of Japanese and Australian involvement in the creation of this exhibition can be made known. An introductory panel may acknowledge the names of designers, sponsors and object donors, allowing the visitor to draw their own conclusions.

Secondly, the Cultural Centre may offer alternative images of Japan which address the constructed image of a homogenous Japan. This could be achieved by approaching alternative groups for donations of objects which they believe represents their identity. This may prove problematic, however, as minority groups are likely to have priorities higher than donating gifts to overseas tourist destinations.

A more obtainable solution would be to make the centre’s existing library more accessible to visitors. Books, journals and audio-visual presentations provide a large source of diverse images of Japan, requiring little by the centre’s staff. Currently, the library is unwelcoming, appearing to be ‘off-limits’ to visitors. Provision of comfortable reading chairs, and a mention of the library’s availability upon entering, would increase visitors’ use. Audio-visual presentations could be incorporated into student visits.
Reconsider Schiele’s (1995) argument that it is possible to construct and present a framework to the visitor before their arrival at the museum, which will guide their interpretation of the displays. Perhaps another solution is to promote the museum as an interpretation - much like an artwork - rather than an educational institution. In this way, the visitor may be more likely to view the exhibition critically, regarding it as the collector’s or exhibitor’s world-view, rather than accepting it as fact.

It is clear that there are methods by which the processes behind image-making in museums can be made visible. However, it is these same influences which perhaps deny the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre the opportunity to fulfil this challenge. The income brought to Cowra by tourists and Japanese investors is only increasing in importance as further emphasis is placed on the shared history of Cowra and Japan. Additional developments are now being made to Cowra’s tourist industry which require financial assistance from outside sources. A recreation of Cowra’s Prisoner of War Camp is planned at a cost of eight million dollars, and developers have proposed the new site become the national Prisoner of War interpretation centre. The development has received one million dollars from the Cowra Shire, whilst the remainder will be sought from private, corporate and government sponsorship (Apthorpe, cited in Reid, 1997: 28).

Approximately sixty thousand visitors travel to the Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre each year (Byron, G. 1997, pers. comm., 13 June), whilst the centre is promoted as a facility in which one can learn about Japan. It is thus with some
seriousness that the challenge of revealing the underlying influences upon this museum be considered.
Reference List


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