
Japanese wisdom? Natural cultures and cultural natures

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Abstract

Japanese society and academics from various disciplines have displayed a particular interest in the analytical and explanatory power of the concept of culture. In the eighties of the previous century Japanese scholars were the first to 'apply' the concept of culture to organisational and economical performance, in order to explain the economic successes of Japanese businesses. Japanese primatologists were also among the first to recognise and describe culture in monkeys. Japanese were to become the 'sushi masters' (cf. de Waal 2010) in 'culture talk' (cf. Mamdani 2005).

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> In both instances Western anthropologists have followed suit: first by embracing the notion of organisational culture, and now by cautiously, and maybe sometimes even reluctantly, joining the stage of the debates on animal cultures. This paper is a reflection on 'Japanese wisdom' and in its wake tries to answer the question what an anthropological interpretation of culture can add to studying animals.

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