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Research Note

Care, Ethics, and *Omoiyari*: Doing Ethnography in Japan

Jennifer COATES*

This research note proposes an adapted version of an ethics of care that begins from the position of *omoiyari*, empathy based on close attention, as a means of creating an ethical framework for ethnographic study design, research practice, and writing. Applying this ethical intention to research practice can enrich engagement with the focus of research, whether that focus is a person or a group of people, or a text or archive. Drawing from a four-year ethno-historical research project in Japan, I demonstrate how *omoiyari*, applied as an adapted ethics of care, can show us new aspects of a research field and the study participants we work with, and identify design errors in the research plan as well as how to amend these errors. Finally, I explore writing strategies that not only underline the ethics of care shaping the research but also attempt to engage the reader in a relationship of care with the study participant. Weaving an *omoiyari*-informed ethics of care through research project design, fieldwork, and writing practices in this way can address care theorist Nel Noddings' call to "build the conditions under which caring can flourish."

Keywords: research methods, study design, fieldwork, ethnohistory, writing practice, ethics of care, research practice

> Everything we do person-to-person should be characterized by caring. This is true whether it's a stranger or someone we regularly meet and applies most obviously to situations in which we actually encounter others. It's foundational in teaching, in forming friendships, in neighborhoods. Then there is what it does to supply the foundation of our thinking for when we're trying to relate to people at a distance, recognizing we cannot do what we would do if we were face to face. Then asking what can we do to build the conditions under which caring can flourish.
>
> ——Nel Noddings[1]

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1 Noddings, quoted in Yokota, Douglass, and Noddings 2019, p. 116.

For almost forty years, scholars have been debating how "care" as both concept and practice can inform our understanding of the world and its systems, and our roles and relationships therein. This research note draws from writing on ethics and care across a broad range of disciplines and international contexts to consider how care can inform how we do ethnographic research in Japan, from study design, to writing and publishing research findings. Taking seriously Nel Noddings' proposal above, that caring can "supply the foundation of our thinking," I consider how care and attention can be incorporated into research design, practice, and dissemination while acknowledging that many researchers are not members of, or permanently located in, their area of study. I primarily focus on ethnography and draw from my own experience using ethnographic research methods here, but these findings may also be useful in designing an ethical research plan for certain kinds of archival work, for example research in personal archives and with oral history materials.

Research ethics can be challenging for ethnography in area studies, as researchers are often faced with a conflicting set of ethical requirements and norms if the area they study is different from the place where they live and work. While Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in principle provide some standardized ethical guidance for research, interpretation and adaptation of this guidance differs between institutions. Furthermore, the commonly acknowledged principles of IRBs, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, do not specifically address care. In fact, as discussed further below, key voices in the "ethics of care" debates have proposed that an ethics of justice is essentially different, and even diametrically opposed, to an ethics of care.

Publishing research findings internationally can exacerbate the issues described above, as publishers, reviewers, and readers all over the world hold differing expectations about ethics. While we tend to focus most on ethics during study design and fieldwork, the writing process brings its own tensions as stylistic tendencies, ideas about good practice, and varying publishing requirements can change or distort the communication of research findings. This research note addresses all three main aspects of doing ethnography in Japan with attention to care, from study design, through fieldwork, to writing research findings.

Whose Research Ethics? Norms and Expectations in and Outside Japan

Internationally, many IRBs and RECs of individual research institutions and professional associations draw from the fundamental concerns of the U.S. National Research Act.[2] Yet different national education systems have different priorities in relation to research ethics for the humanities and social sciences.[3] This creates a particular problem for area studies, where the acceptable ethical practices of the area or region under study can differ from those of the researcher's home country, workplace, publishing venue, or collaborators. To illustrate these issues, this research note reflects on the experience of designing and undertaking a four-year ethno-historical study of the memories of postwar cinema culture in Japan while based at a Japanese university. On completing the study, I returned to the U.K. and began writing and publishing under a new set of expectations about research ethics. Moving between two

2 Enacted by the U.S. Congress and signed into law in 1974.

3 By contrast, the biological sciences, health, and medicine have been considering international research ethics for some time. See Suzuki and Sato 2016; Tsuchiya 2003; Yanagawa, Katashima, and Takeda 2015; Macfarlane and Saitoh 2008.

different institutions and countries at this stage in my research project demonstrated to me the differing expectations and norms around research ethics in the U.K. and Japan. At the same time, by thinking critically about practices of care and caring in the research and writing of this project, I sought to balance the needs and comfort of my research participants while meeting the requirements of each country's ethical research principles.

While designing and conducting my ethno-historical study from within a Japanese university (2014–2018), I found ethics review processes at that institution to be mainly concerned with the use of research funds and enforced through the viewing of mandatory training videos rather than formal approvals or applications. At a national level, data protection laws such as the Act on the Protection of Personal Information (APPI, 2003) exempt universities and other institutions using personal data for academic purposes, unless there is potential harm to study participants. The Japan Science and Technology Agency's Research Integrity Portal collects government guidance and produces text and video instructions for researchers, which tend to focus on plagiarism, behavioral misconduct among researchers working together in shared labs, and misuse of research funds. Additional materials continue to be created by the Association for the Promotion of Research Integrity (APRIN, 2016).[4]

The U.K. equivalent of the APPI, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018) applies to all researchers and universities, with some exemptions for research in the public interest. Perhaps for this reason, the U.K. higher education system emphasizes the secure storage of data, along with the personal safety of the researcher, and application-based ethical review processes for research involving humans and animals. While each university has its own research ethics committee with specific approval procedures, preparation materials, and application platforms, advice and training is offered at a national level by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO). However, internal university ethics approval processes are rarely formally connected to individual researchers' publishing practice, and the outcome of university ethics review procedures are not specifically requested by many publishers in advance of publication.

The international professional associations available to ethnographers of Japan, such as the Association for Asian Studies (1941–present) and the British Association of Japanese Studies (1974–present) do not maintain their own ethics guidance materials. A participant-focused set of guidelines for research in Japan is available in Japanese from the Anthropological Society of Nippon (ASN), collating "ethical considerations which are widely considered necessary in anthropology."[5] This useful guidance emphasizes informed consent in the design and practice of anthropological research, as well as attention to ethical principles in writing, publishing, and disseminating results: "At each stage of reporting, we have a responsibility to give sufficient ethical consideration to gain the understanding and trust of the target audience" (*jūbunna rinriteki hairyo o harau sekinin ga aru* 十分な倫理的配慮を払う責任がある).[6] This provided the most comprehensive outline for the design of my own study in 2014, and is notable for its focus on responsibility, trust, and consideration (*hairyo* 配慮), principles which also inform many of the interpretations of an ethics of care discussed below.

4 Chou, Lee, and Fudano 2024.
5 Nihon Jinrui Gakkai 2006, p. 1.
6 Nihon Jinrui Gakkai 2006, p. 2.

The ASN guidance is available to Japanese-language readers who know where to find it, that is, speakers of Japanese who already identify as anthropologists. As ethnography in Japan is also conducted by non-Japanese speakers, and by researchers who may not be trained anthropologists (such as myself), this research note draws from English and Japanese guidance and scholarship across a range of disciplines to consider how we might place care at the center of ethnographies of Japan. The international aspect of this endeavor is deliberate, as debates about research ethics have often been siloed by discipline, language, and geographical area. International research collaboration has even been identified by the Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as a potential risk to research ethics and integrity in itself, in that projects risk falling between the differing expectations of national ethics training and approval systems.[7]

While this research note explores ethics issues that will be relevant to many different kinds of ethnographic research projects in Japan, drawing from my own experience as a non-Japanese ethnographer requires some attention to the positionality of the researcher from outside Japan, and its implications for research ethics. Research ethics guidance for ethnography and fieldwork, such as that produced by the ASN, often assumes a power differential between the researcher and research participant that requires a certain ethical approach. In the case of Anglo-European scholars practicing ethnography in Japan, anthropologist Elise Edwards notes that a slightly different power dynamic is more common: "Studying a former non-Western colonizer, and present-day First World economic power entails many more relationships in which anthropologists work 'across' and 'up,' rather than the rigorously interrogated and analyzed direction 'down.'"[8] While this point is well-taken, it is useful to note that a number of core works that inform studies of Japan today were in fact produced in extremely unequal conditions. For example, Ruth Benedict's foundational text *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), which is today excerpted in Japanese school textbooks, was based on interviews with people interned in War Relocation Camps in the U.S. during World War II. However, Edwards' reminder that the ethical implications of research do not end when the researcher leaves the field is core to understanding the extent to which our approach to research ethics shapes not only research practice itself but also writing and publishing. "Just like our colleagues working with less wealthy, educated, or otherwise privileged subjects, we are still the ones in control of the actual act of writing our texts—an unquestionably powerful act."[9] This research note asks what we can take from debates on "ethics of care," both in and outside Japan, in order to practice and write ethical ethnography.

Debating Ethics and Care

The foundational works around which the ethics of care debates have evolved include psychologist Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, education philosopher Nel Noddings' *Caring*, political scientist Joan C. Tronto's "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care" and feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking*.[10] These scholars proposed using conceptions of care, and ethics inherent to practices of caring, as alternate frameworks

7 MEXT 2021.
8 Edwards 2007, pp. 571–572.
9 Edwards 2007, p. 572.
10 Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984; Tronto 1987; Ruddick 1980; Ruddick 1989.

for theorizing, counter to moral theories such as utilitarianism, which tended to focus on justice. However, the degree of difference and disagreement between these scholars and their definitions of care and caring means that there is no single "ethics of care." Key debates in the field have arisen around the following areas: conflicting understandings of the self as relational or as independent and autonomous; emphases on emotion-based deliberation as opposed to reason; and attention to context and particularity as opposed to universal preestablished principles.[11] Care ethicists also continue to debate whether care and justice are contrasting or complementary moral frames, and to what extent understanding the instinct to care as gendered is helpful in social life.[12]

In anthropology and cultural studies, addressing an ethics of care often takes the form of a focus on the researcher or viewer's own attitude of caring (or otherwise) for the study participants or the people or characters featured in the texts or media under study.[13] Ethnographic research tends to engage with an ethics of care in relation to research topics which are in themselves care-focused, such as ethnographies of healthcare provision, aged care, maternity and female healthcare, or in situations where violence is a key element of the research topic, from intimate partner violence to terrorism.[14] Studies of care work, care homes, nursing, elder care, the automation of care work in Japan, and the lives of carers in Japan are often framed within an ethics of care informed by Gilligan, Noddings, and Tronto's writings, which are also available in translation in Japanese.[15] For example, sociologist Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子 has based her critique of the economic undervaluing of caring, understood as an act of love, on Gilligan's ethics of care, highlighting the class and gender issues at the heart of a society-wide devaluing of care and care work.[16] While variations on an ethics of care have been applied to a range of Japanese case studies and field sites, political scientist Helena Olofsdotter Stensöta argues that "the object of most studies remains within areas already considered relevant to care."[17] Given the definition of care offered by Joan Tronto—"everything we do to maintain and reproduce ourselves and 'the world' so that we can live in it as well as possible"—a possible broader scope becomes evident.[18] This research note considers the design, fieldwork, and writing of ethnographic research in Japan from the perspective of care to explore the use of an ethics of care beyond the scope of care work and care issues. Here I am following Michael Slote's suggestion that the ethics of care can be productively applied beyond the study of care itself.[19]

Omoiyari as the Practice of Care

Discussions of caring and ethics in Japanese-language scholarship and ethnography often use the *katakana* script used to transcribe foreign words to render care as *kea*, and ethics of care as *kea no rinri* ケアの倫理. Sociologist Yamane Sumika 山根純佳 explores the difference between *kea* and other, more specific terms that connote caring, to make a distinction between care

11 Keller and Kittay 2017, pp. 540–543.
12 Okano 2012; Okano 2015; Okano 2016; Okano 2021; Ogawa 2021; Ozaki 2015.
13 Chouliaraki and Orgad 2011.
14 Das 2007; Cook and Trundle 2020.
15 Gilligan 1986; Yamane 2005; Izumi 2007; Asakura 2009; Parks 2010; Takayama 2014; Danely 2016.
16 Ueno 2011.
17 Stensöta 2015, pp. 183–184.
18 Tronto and Fisher 1990, p. 40.
19 Slote 2007.

as an attitude or feeling, and care as act or practice: "Care [*kea*] is a concept that refers to physical activities and labor, and at the same time refers to attitudes toward others, such as consideration [*hairyo*] and *omoiyari*."[20] "Consideration" (*hairyo*) is the word used by the ASN to emphasize the importance of paying attention to the research environment and needs of research participants. However, in applying an ethics-of-care approach to ethnographic research we should consider several variants and modes of care in practice in order to remain flexible to adapting to research participants' needs, as the ASN advises. For example, Yamane points out that a closer translation of the care in Gilligan's ethics of care would be *omoiyari*. Indeed, this was the word used in the title of the first Japanese translation of Gilligan's *In Another Voice* by Iwao Sumiko 岩男寿美子 in 1986, before subsequent translations adopted the more conceptual *kea*.[21] Since then, sociologists such as Takahashi Kaoru 高橋薫 have referred to *omoiyari* as "the Japanese ethics of care."[22] Yamane argues that a nuanced and accurate translation of "ethics of care" in Japanese would be something like "an 'ethics of consideration' [*hairyo*] or 'compassion' [*omoiyari*]."[23]

How can we practice "the Japanese ethics of care" in ethnographic research in Japan? Applying *omoiyari* to ethnographic research goes beyond ethical study design to inform fieldwork and writing. Communication scholar Hara Kazuya 原和也 and sociologist Takahashi Kaoru emphasize that *omoiyari* is not only a feeling, but also connotes actions motivated by *omoiyari*.[24] "With *omoiyari*, people must feel what others are feeling and consider the most appropriate behaviour accordingly, without making a direct verbal request. This demands empathic imagination and projection to put oneself into others' shoes."[25] This is quite close to Noddings' reworking of a well-known Bible phrase; "'Do unto others as they would have done unto them,' which means you have to think about what the other is feeling. Not just how I would feel in that situation but how is this other person really feeling? That is a major difference."[26] Emphasising *omoiyari* in fieldwork and writing means paying attention to information that can indicate how research participants are feeling, using observation and empathy rather than direct questioning. The directionality of *omoiyari*, which is composed of 思, the character for thinking and 遣り or やり, meaning to send, give, or do, helpfully illustrates Nodding's key point that care must come from "direct contact," paying close attention to the needs of others.[27]

This close attention can then inform how we react to changes in the fieldwork environment in order to remain flexible to research participants' needs. Japanese school textbooks introduce *omoiyari* as a means of paying attention to others in order to decide "what is the best thing to do?"[28] This relational approach to making ethical decisions recalls the ASN guidance, which reminds ethnographers that ethical conduct is determined by context and changes according to the needs of study participants. A relational understanding of ethical decision-making is also consistent with Gilligan, Noddings, and Tronto's

20 Yamane 2005, p. 1.
21 Gilligan 1986.
22 Takahashi 2022, p. 2.
23 Yamane 2005, p. 6.
24 Hara 2006.
25 Takahashi 2022, p. 2.
26 Noddings, quoted in Yokota, Douglass, and Noddings 2019, p. 115.
27 Noddings, quoted in Yokota, Douglass, and Noddings 2019, p. 115.
28 Hayashi, Karasawa, and Tobin 2009, p. 41.

conceptualizations of ethics of care, which all emphasize relationality and responsiveness.[29] Focusing on care in relation, or *omoiyari*-style care as a basis for designing ethical research, shifts our focus from the researcher's role as carer, which can become overly central to the research itself, and towards closer attention to the other.

Care, Consideration, and *Omoiyari* in Ethnographic Research Methods

From 2014–2018, I worked with more than one hundred elderly film fans in the Kansai region on an ethnographic project about memories of postwar cinema culture to produce a monograph and short ethnographic film.[30] I used mixed methods including interviews with film viewers who attended the cinema regularly between 1945 and 1968, a long-form questionnaire project involving eighty-seven participants, and participant observation conducted at several cinemas and film groups which regularly showed Shōwa era films (1926–1989). Analyzing how viewers' memories of attending the cinema in postwar Japan intersect with their current attitudes and life projects, this project sought to challenge the idea of postwar cinema as a tool for producing predictable or controlled changes in social attitudes. I was concerned with ethics throughout the project, from worries about a lack of available ethics review frameworks in the planning of the study, to the writing stage, where issues such as the characterization of key participants raised ethical questions. In this section, I will consider how an ethics of care can inform the design, research, and writing of an ethnographic project in Japan in the context of these experiences.

Designing with Care: Omoiyari *in Research Project Planning*

Arriving in the Kansai region in 2014, I was new to both the area and to ethnographic methods. In designing a project that offered the opportunity to speak to living cinema viewers about their memories, I worried about choosing the wrong words to explain my research and to interview participants, and I was concerned about miscommunication, particularly at the recruitment stage. I therefore began the project with a general questionnaire survey to develop an emic approach to understanding the key terms my target demographic used among themselves to discuss their habits, memories, and feelings. Building this stage into my project allowed me to incorporate the "attention, solicitude, and active involvement with others" that characterizes care in action.[31]

I obtained permission to conduct the survey at the Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan 京都文化博物館 (The Museum of Kyoto), known as Bunpaku, which houses a film theater on its third floor. In consultation with a local research assistant and museum staff, I developed a questionnaire in two formats, one page and two page, to allow those taking the survey to choose their own degree of participation. As this was the first ethnographic study of general cinema viewership practices in Japan to be written in English, I sought to impose as little of my own assumptions on the language as possible. I attempted to keep the phrasing of the questions neutral, aiming to generate free responses from which I could identify recurring patterns in word choice and viewer preferences. The planning of the questionnaire took six months, after which I conducted a one-week survey at the Bunpaku film theater from 18 May

29 Tronto 2012, p. 303.
30 Coates 2022.
31 Ciulla 2009, p. 3.

to 24 May 2016. I left stamped addressed envelopes in the museum lobby and word-of-mouth transmission of the project's goals enabled me to continue collecting questionnaire responses for three months after the Bunpaku survey ended, and introduced me to the film screening clubs that would become my next sites of participant observation.

Beginning my project design from a questionnaire survey allowed me to build the knowledge required to understand how to create a comfortable atmosphere for research participants. Takahashi notes that practicing *omoiyari* requires that "a person must be knowledgeable and sensible enough to understand what can make the other feel comfortable, happy, or less stressed, and to offer the most appropriate material, environmental, or emotional arrangements."[32] Establishing the project with a questionnaire survey taught me my participants' preferred ways of expressing their feelings about their postwar memories, and allowed me to work that language into my interview questions in the second stage of the project to create a comfortable atmosphere. At the same time, observing participants in the survey taught me a lot about the physical care needs of the demographic that I sought to recruit, and enabled me to create a comfortable environment for later interviews. For example, I had provided clipboards for participants to use when completing questionnaires, but it soon became clear that the core demographic of the Bunpaku, mainly aged between seventy and ninety-five, needed more time (the longer two-page questionnaire was overwhelmingly more popular than the short one-page "tick box" version). I sourced a larger number of chairs and offered stamped self-addressed envelopes to complete the survey at home. It also became clear that a number of participants were primarily interested in the survey as an opportunity to chat, or for some international exchange. Taking time with study participants during the breaks between films to chat about topics outside the survey not only fostered friendships but also revealed fascinating details about cinema culture in the early postwar period.

Paying close attention to my study participants and amending my approach in response to their actions helped me to see where I had built mistakes into my methods. For example, while the audience of the Bunpaku theater was either gender-balanced or around sixty per cent male and forty per cent female, there was a large gender bias in favor of male viewers in the survey responses collected. Though the questionnaire was anonymous, the majority of respondents waived anonymity in favor of signing their names. From both this and observing respondents depositing questionnaires in the return box, the gender disparity was clear. I noticed that male patrons often came to the Bunpaku cinema alone, while women more frequently attended in couples or groups. Of the mixed-gender couples I observed, women were often dissuaded or distracted from completing a questionnaire by the needs or preferences of their male partners. Several male attendees refused to wait while their female partners completed a questionnaire, requiring the women to abandon the project or take the half-completed questionnaire home to return at a later date. As the early postwar is often considered a peak period of cinema attendance for women, and production of so-called women's films, the lack of female study participants at this early stage was frustrating.

I had recently formed a friendship with a woman in her seventies who had expressed interest in my study, and so I asked her opinion as to why so few women were participating despite communicating an interest in the project. Our friendship was in the early stages and involved the exchange of lots of small gifts, so I brought some movie ephemera along

32 Takahashi 2022, p. 2.

with a sample questionnaire and some seasonal sweets to our meeting to create a relaxed conversational atmosphere and encourage my friend to take her time considering my question. Looking at the third question on the survey, she told me, "I think women are discouraged by this one." I had thought that my opening questions were quite neutral, and after asking for the respondent's gender and age of first cinema visit, question three asked how frequently the respondent had gone to the cinema in the period 1945–1968; multiple times per week, once per week, two to three times per month, or once per month. My friend pointed out that in the early postwar years women did not form cinema-going habits in the same numbers as men, and subsequently did not feel that they had the expert status required to teach a foreign researcher about the history of Japanese cinema.[33] I learned that the design of this early questionnaire model had unintentionally excluded a number of women who were glad to participate after confirming that weekly cinema attendance was not a prerequisite for participation.

While this error in design had risked recruitment to the project, it led to findings that significantly shaped its outcomes. At the same time, better understanding of participants' reasons for hesitating to complete the questionnaire also demonstrated to me the two-way nature of caring in the research environment, as my study participants had resisted engaging with a topic that interested them out of concern for the effect their participation might have on my research findings. Spending time together in the spaces and activities that were common to their daily routines allowed us to come to a better understanding of each other. As a result, I had the opportunity to adapt my research methods to better fit the needs of my participants, and they in turn felt freer to share their thoughts without concerns about causing problems for my research by giving unexpected or non-standard answers. This specific example illustrates how the "empathetic imagination and projection" of *omoiyari* can enhance ethnography project design by bringing the researcher and participants into closer understanding of each other's needs and wishes, which then informs fieldwork practices.[34]

Fieldwork as a Site of Care

Of course, the researcher is not the only one concerned with care in the field. Care was a consistent theme among my study participants in several field sites, particularly the *eigakai* 映画会 or film viewing clubs where I met many interlocutors. The organizers of one regular monthly *eigakai* even referred to themselves as *sewanin* 世話人, or "caretakers" of the long-running club. Considering fieldwork as a location in which care is practiced demonstrates the matrixes of care criss-crossing my field sites. For example, in discussions of specific films they remembered from childhood, a number of study participants noted that nature films had taught them to care about the world around them. Many cited Disney's *The Living Desert* (directed by James Algar, 1953, and released in Japan as *Sabaku wa ikite iru* 砂漠は生きている in 1955) as an example of a film that had made them aware of humans' role as caretakers in the world. Several participants who were well-educated in film industry news as well as cinema viewing noted familial, romantic, and caring relationships among the creators of their favorite films, such as the works of director Kinoshita Keisuke 木下恵介 (1912–1998) with his composer brother Kinoshita Chūji 木下忠司 (1916–2018), the collaborations of

33 Coates 2017.
34 Takahashi 2022, p. 2.

director Ichikawa Kon 市川崑 (1915–2008) with his screenwriter wife Wada Natto 和田夏十 (1920–1983), and the sensitive romantic depictions by director Matsuyama Zenzō 松山善三 (1925–2016) of characters played by his wife, Takamine Hideko 高峰秀子 (1924–2010). Care for the memorialization of a period of cinema culture, care for the world fostered by film texts, and care relationships among filmmakers and industry workers were all frequent topics of conversation among my study participants.

At the same time, however, my field sites were not uniformly sites of caring behavior as disputes broke out among study participants relatively regularly. Navigating through these conflicts while maintaining relationships required a certain kind of care. As Joan Tronto observes, "The perspective of care requires that conflict be worked out without damage to the continuing relationships."[35] From disputes among the groups of friends who organized regular cultural outings to arguments among the members of the *eigakai* I frequented, staying connected to my participants over the long duration of my fieldwork taught me to manage conflict from the perspective of care. This often took the form of *omoiyari* in that paying close attention to the contexts of the conflicts and the particular interests, passions, or preoccupations of those engaged in dispute allowed me to understand disagreement as one part of the relationships present in a field site, rather than as an event that ends a relationship.

Understanding differences among my participants was key to conceptualizing conflict from a perspective of care. Elise Edwards notes that "the notion that 'those' we study are some homogeneous entity" is often accidentally implied by reminders that anthropologists' first responsibility is to their study participants.[36] In fact, Edwards argues, "It is more often the case that our subjects and sites are heterogeneous, in complicated power relationships, and that the 'best interest' of one individual or group of subjects, may be directly detrimental to others with whom we also work."[37] This observation was borne out in the *eigakai* field site, where power relationships tended to be gerontological, but also encompassed class and level of articulacy.

Disagreements and even fights sometimes broke out between *eigakai* members. For example, in December 2016, nineteen people met to watch *12 Angry Men* (directed by Sidney Lumet, 1957), and *Kayako no tame ni* 伽倻子のために (*For Kayako*, directed by Oguri Kōhei 小栗康平, 1984), films which the member who had chosen them (known as the *zachō* 座長 of the meeting) introduced as united by the theme of justice and injustice. Oguri's story of *zainichi* Korean characters living in Japan brought forth a characteristically frank discussion about Japanese-Korean relations, and the legacies of the Fifteen Years War and World War II. One group member articulated her perception that there was widespread anti-Japanese teaching and sentiment in Korea and China, which began a debate about war responsibility that got very heated. Another group member argued that Japan had not really lost the war directly to America or to China, as the kind of direct combat seen in Vietnam had not occurred in Japan. A third speaker dismissed this as "stupid thinking" (*ahoteki kangaekata*) and soon the insults "stupid" and its variants (*baka, aho)* were being thrown around generally in the group discussion. The atmosphere was definitely charged, but not explicitly angry. People laughed incredulously at other's statements and appeared more excited than offended

35 Tronto 1987, p. 658.
36 Edwards 2007, p. 572.
37 Edwards 2007, p. 572.

by the debate. The oldest *sewanin* sat with eyes closed and a look of mild irritation. When a younger *sewanin* asked her opinion, she firmly expressed her belief that the film club was no place for talking about politics or historical truth, and that discussion should be centered on the film itself. The group deferred to her opinion and re-routed the conversation.

Understanding how to respond to such outbreaks of aggression in the field can be tricky, and a classic ethics of care such as Noddings' would suggest the researcher prioritize the needs of the person closest to them over the needs of the group. This was quite awkward, as my closest friend had been the one to bring up her suspicion about anti-Japanese teaching and sentiment in Korea and China. Taking an *omoiyari*-style caring approach allows for more subtlety in understanding the situation, as Takahashi's interpretation of *omoiyari* would require the researcher to practice "great sensitivity to the different morals, practices, and ideologies unfolding within diverse landscapes of care."[38] I tried to better understand the context of the discussion within the practices common to the *zadankai* 座談会, or closing group discussion, held every month after screenings. This was a place where people quite often said outrageous or illogical things, apparently intending to provoke lively discussion. In previous interviews, group members had expressed surprise when I asked if they would go to a cinema theater with other members of the group, or socialize together outside the film club, and a few frankly told me that they did not consider the *eigakai* members to be their friends. Nonetheless, they devoted seven or eight hours every month to the long multi-screening meetings and never missed the discussion. I began to understand the group as something of an outlet for members' preferences and opinions, and perhaps even a place where they would propose theories or share prejudices that they would not discuss with members of their families or social circles for fear of offending. In the rowdy *zadankai*, club members had (almost) free reign to say what they liked, at least until an older member stopped the debate. Taking an *omoiyari*-informed perspective enabled me to better understand these nuances in communication among *eigakai* members, as well as the role of the *eigakai* itself in members' social lives.

After leaving Japan in 2018, I continued communication with several study participants and field sites online and in short visits. From March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the *eigakai* that I had been attending to close. The lead *sewanin* regularly updated members by email on the difficult decision to keep the club closed. "We caretakers have a responsibility to give due consideration to safety" he wrote. A few months later, he wrote again to the club membership to resume a favorite club theme, the role of humans as caretakers in the world. "This Corona problem has been exacerbated and pushed by global economic growth. For human beings who do not care about artificial climate change and the destruction of our ecosystem, it may be a warning from the natural world. If you have any opinions or criticisms regarding the above, please feel free to send them to the caretaker. Lastly, please continue to be vigilant against infections and spend your time wisely during the disaster." *Sewanin* emails began to shift in tone and content, from their original function as places to recap *zadankai* discussions and advertise the next month's meeting, to a kind of cheerleading that offered moral support to the many members who were afraid to leave their homes during the pandemic due to age and preexisting health conditions. The *eigakai* never did restart, but the final *sewanin* email urged, "Everyone, please take care of yourself (*gojiai* ご自愛)."

38 Takahashi 2022, p. 2.

Staying in communication with the *eigakai* after leaving Japan allowed for a responsive flexibility in my fieldwork; while many ethnographers experienced the COVID-19 pandemic as a challenging period in which they were shut out of physical field sites, the caution of my elderly study participants in moving their interactions online afforded me greater continuing access to the group discussion. At the same time, the heightened emotional charge of the pandemic brought discussions of care and caring into more explicit expression than had been common in face-to-face group meetings. The *eigakai* itself was a practice of care—care in the preservation of memories of a particular era of cinema, but also care as practiced among *eigakai* members who attempted to distract and cheer one another in the darkest days of the pandemic. Writing my research findings into a book manuscript, I turned to the question of how to communicate the warm sense of care emanating from my now-online field site.

Writing with Care: Omoiyari *as a Mode of Recognition*

Face to face or in close online contact with a friend and research participant the moral requirement and instinctive act of caring for the other can be quite clear. Yet writing up research findings, particularly at a distance from research participants, can challenge an ethics of care in practice. The tendency to understand rigorous scholarship as taking the form of unemotional, neutral, or even critical writing, the difficulty of condensing complicated emotions and motivations into clear scholarly expression, and the pressure of word limits, deadlines, and publisher requirements can render the representation of research participants and their views and speech less than caring. As I finalized my manuscript, research participants would write to me regularly of their fear and boredom, and with updates on which film clubs or screening circles had recently closed. My study participants were aged between seventy-five and ninety-five, and so COVID-19 was no small threat to their health and daily existence, recalling "the first tenet of the ethics of care: the human is vulnerable."[39] As the screening clubs and discussion groups shut down, many permanently, the scholarly importance of preserving their memories and voices became more evident to me. Revising my manuscript from a distance, I struggled with competing senses of obligation and responsibility. Preserving an honest account of the role of cinema in the everyday lives of my study participants appeared increasingly meaningful as those everyday lives changed and narrowed, and opportunities for individuals to go out into the world and communicate were severely reduced. At the same time, my study participants appeared as newly vulnerable to me, and I became more wary of writing anything that could cast individuals in a negative light.

Retaining my original system of anonymization, I attempted to infuse my writing with close observations of gesture and expression to prompt a recognition of the personhood of each interviewee. In creating a sense of closeness between reader and speaker, I hoped to invite the reader to feel care for the study participants and to assess their words from within that caring context. I had filmed twelve core interviews which I had edited into a short documentary film in order to involve my research participants in a more collaborative way, and produce a version of the project accessible to them in Japanese. I returned to the raw footage, weaving descriptions of participants' gestures and expressions into my writing to create the sense of real people speaking directly to the reader. I paid particular attention to the

39 Laugier 2015, p. 219.

effort involved in communication, showing where the speaker seemed to be working hard to educate or entertain, or to communicate something intensely personal.

Using anthropologist Peter Stromberg's concept of "enacted culture" I applied a film-studies-style close reading to the physical communications performed by speakers in recorded interviews. Stromberg argues that "iconic manual gestures, direct quotation, emotional expressions, and facial portrayals" are tools used within the telling of a narrative "to elaborate, enhance, and generally present [the speaker's] take on what that knowledge and its significance are."[40] Grouping these behaviours together as "enacted culture," Stromberg notes that such performances "can be used to channel emotional arousal into a particular perspective on reality and thereby either validate or transform conventions or experience."[41] Exploring how my interviewees used narratives about film viewership and cinema-going to communicate their beliefs and experiences, I attempted to bring the reader closer to their perspectives by analysing gesture and expression as augmentations to denotational speech. In this way, I aimed to create the kind of *omoiyari* close attention that evokes care in practice. Borrowing my study participants' particular phrasing and combining these with accounts of their expressions, gestures, and a sense of their physical presence, I tried to evoke not only the historical moments they described, but also their feelings about these moments. Developing writing strategies that not only communicate the care taken in the research process but also act as a call to care in the reader can embed an ethics of care in ethnographic writing. Threading an *omoiyari*-informed attention to care and practices of caring through study design, fieldwork, and writing improves research methods and reveals additional information, enriching research findings. *Omoiyari*-informed ethnographic writing can itself act as a call for readers to practice their own mode of caring in recognizing the personhood of the study participants whose voices are evoked in ethnography.

Conclusion: Considerate Study Design, *Omoiyari* in the Field, and Careful Writing

This research note has proposed an adapted version of an ethics of care that begins from the position of *omoiyari*, empathy based on close attention, as a means of creating an ethical framework for ethnographic study design, research practice, and writing. Applying this ethical intention to our research practice can enrich engagement with the focus of research, whether that focus is a person or a group of people, or a text or archive. Drawing from my own experience, I have sought to demonstrate how *omoiyari*, applied as an adapted ethics of care, can show us new aspects of a research field and study participants, and demonstrate design errors in the research plan as well as how to amend these errors. Finally, I have explored writing strategies that not only underline the ethics of care shaping the research but also attempt to engage the reader in a relationship of care with the study participant. Weaving an *omoiyari*-informed ethics of care through research project design, fieldwork, and writing practices in this way can address Noddings' call to "build the conditions under which caring can flourish."[42]

40 Stromberg 2021, p. 429.
41 Stromberg 2021, p. 428.
42 Noddings, quoted in Yokota, Douglass and Noddings 2019, p. 116.

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