Different Things under the Same Name?

A Research Dialogue on Self-Help Organisations between a Japanese Social Worker and an Australian Anthropologist

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要約

日本の自助組織は米国や豪州で言われている自助組織と同じものなのか。同じ名称がついている別種の組織である可能性はないのか。本論文は、この疑問に日本の社会福祉研究者と豪州の人類学者が答えようとしたものである。本論の前半は日本人の著者が、疑問の根拠として日本の文化の特質と、それに関連した自助組織の研究上の難しさについて述べる。後半は豪州人の著書が、豪州アボリジニのアルコール依存症患者による自助組織でのフィールドワークの体験を基に、前半に出された課題について答える。言及された研究上の難しさの一部は豪州での調査においても見られ、決して日本に限ったことではないことが指摘される。日本でも豪州でも自助組織の調査は社会的に不利な立場に置かれた人々への調査であり、高い倫理性が求められる。異なる社会的条件は自助組織に異なる形態を与えるが、多様な組織形態の研究は自助組織の概念と理論を発展させることにつながるだろう。

Abstract

Are Japanese self-help organisations intrinsically the same as what Americans and Australians call "self-help organisations"? Is it possible that quite different organisations are known by the same name in different cultures? In this paper, this question is answered by a Japanese social worker and an Australian anthropologist. In the first half of the paper, the Japanese author discusses Japanese cultural traits that can make it difficult to research self-help organisations. In the second half, the Australian author refers to his fieldwork and research with Australian Aboriginal self-help organisations for alcoholics, to elaborate on the methodological and ethical issues that are examined in the first half of the paper. It appears that some methodological difficulties mentioned by the Japanese author are not peculiar to Japanese researchers or Japanese culture and are encountered in other countries, such as Australia. Research on self-help organisations is conducted with socially disadvantaged and marginalised people, whether it is done in Japan or Australia, therefore strict research ethics are imperative. Different social environments provide self-help organisations with different forms and functions. By studying the variations between self-help organisations, we can develop and enrich concepts and theories of self-help organisations.

Key words

Self-help organisations, Japanese culture, Australian Aboriginal people, Research methodology, Research ethics

The aim of this paper is to discuss methodological issues associated with research on self-help organisations. To explore the issues with greater breadth and flexibility, this paper is written as a dialogue between two authors: a Japanese social work researcher and an Australian anthropologist, both of whom have had a long and deep involvement with self-help organisations, although their research fields have been quite different. The Japanese author, Oka, has worked with parents of ill children, whereas Chenhall has worked with Aboriginal people suffering from substance misuse problems. The latter, has been a visiting scholar at Sophia University, Tokyo from 2006 through 2007, and following on from his comprehensive study on self-help treatment organisations for Australian Aboriginal alcoholics, is starting his fieldwork with self-help organisations for alcoholics in Japan.

This paper consists of two parts. Part I is by the Japanese author, and starts with a question that has haunted him for about twenty years, since he went to the UK and discussed self-help organisations with British social workers. It is: "Are we discussing the same thing or different things under the same name?" On his first visit to this Western country, he felt that there were numerous subtle differences between Japanese self-help organisations and their British counterparts. Since then, whenever he has talked about Japanese self-help organisations with North Americans, Britons and Australians, he cannot help but think that the organisations that he has worked with might be *substantially* different from what Westerners call self-help organisations. To elaborate on this question, he provides several episodes and personal experiences that have kept the above question alive in his mind.

Part II is by the Australian author. By referring to his own fieldwork with Australian Aboriginal alcoholics, he responds to the questions raised in Part I. He reflects on similarities between Australian and Japanese self-help organisations, and demonstrates that there are similarities in the problems faced by researchers in both countries. In the research of both authors, the participants have been socially disadvantaged and marginalised. Researchers who approach such populations will inevitably have difficulties in accessing and establishing trusted relationships, hence it is imperative that researchers conduct their research and approach their participants with high ethical standards.

Part I: Are our self-help organisations the same as yours?

Whenever I discuss self-help organisations with non-Japanese scholars, I am mindful of a question which has been with me for a long time: Are what I call "self-help organisations" the same as what they call "self-help organisations"? Is it possible that totally different organisations quite by chance have similar missions and similar memberships, and as a consequent are identically named "self-help organisations"? Think of the word, "country." The US and Japan are each called a "country," but the former is federated, whereas the latter is not. Japan has the Emperor under a constitutional monarchy, whereas the US does not. China, on the other hand, has over one thousand million people, while the smallest country in the world has less than one thousand inhabitants. Despite this diversity, can we still call each of them "a country"? Another example is "family." In different cultures, there are different forms of family. Fostering is an essential aspect of family in one culture, while it is exceptional in another. Family means only parents and children in one culture,

but it includes grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins in another. Homosexual marriage is a naturally accepted part of family in one culture, whereas in others it is an unthinkable idea. It is therefore entirely possible for two people who are discussing "family" to be talking about very different things.

There is one thing that "country" and "family" share, and that is that they both existed long before they were known by these names. And so it is with many self-help organisations. They also existed long before they were given the name "self-help organisations." On the other hand, some groups have come into being since their title was invented. A good example of this is a therapy group set up by social workers. First, social workers learnt the theories of social group work, and then they helped set up such groups according to what they had learnt in an academic setting. Because Japanese social group work theories are greatly influenced, and perhaps even overwhelmed, by American ones, their therapy groups for social work can be very similar to American therapy groups, putting aside group members' behaviours that are culturally different.

It is unfortunate, however, that Japanese self-help organisations rarely had any theoretical discussions before they were influenced by American conceptualisation. I suppose this has led many Japanese people to consider Japanese self-help organisations through "American conceptual glasses." They have explained many aspects of their organisations with US-made terms, and consequently some Japanese scholars have ignored those aspects of Japanese organisations that are unseen or obscured by "American conceptual glasses." For example, some Japanese organisations have "embedded relationships with the government," which I will discuss later in this paper.

Another unfortunate aspect is that Japanese self-help organisations, and the scholars that study them, have rarely interacted with their foreign counterparts. I do not see this as being negligent, because I believe it is due to the fact that self-help organisations basically work locally, and do not need such interactions with foreign counterparts. Although some self-help organisations in Japan have international networks, their international activity has very limited influence on their local groups, probably because of the language barrier. In contrast, multinational enterprises work entirely in the opposite way because their everyday work is international and cross-cultural. Furthermore, each business within each culture was active a long time before multinational enterprises came into being, so the movers and shakers of the multinational enterprises had a long time to study cultural differences thoroughly before committing themselves and their money in foreign lands (for example, Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Morrison, Conaway & Borden, 1994; Silverthorne, 2005). Consequently we have a wealth of literature on cultural differences in the business world. But how much do we know about the cultural differences pertaining to self-help organisations?

I will now relate some episodes that occurred in Japanese voluntary organisations and self-help organisations that I have been personally involved with. I am not sure whether these episodes include any peculiarities of Japanese culture, or whether they merely reflect idiosyncrasies of my personal situation. I have chosen them because I believe such things are rarely written about in the textbooks of voluntary organisations, particularly Japanese textbooks, most of which are greatly influenced by American textbooks.

Quiet meetings and the unseen inside

As a social worker, I once worked for a community council of social welfare. The council covered a community made of many neighbourhood societies, and in total consisted of over one hundred thousand people. One day, my agency hosted a meeting that was supposed to be attended by representatives from all the neighbourhood societies. The aim of the meeting was to discuss an annual plan for the community's voluntary services, the draft of which had been written by our social workers. The senior social workers at the meeting, who in those days were my supervisors, hoped that their draft would be accepted without any opposition or discussion. They were afraid that if the attendees started to discuss this plan seriously it would not be passed, because they knew that it would be impossible for all the attendees to reach a consensus. Decision-making by majority vote was almost unthinkable in this situation, because this could divide the community. As Reischauer and Jansen (1995) point out, "The key Japanese value is harmony, which they seek to achieve by a subtle process of mutual understanding, almost by intuition, rather than by a sharp analysis of conflicting views or by clear-cut decisions, whether made by one-man dictates or majority votes" (p. 136). In order to avoid any discussion, the senior social workers cleverly identified several influential persons, whom they called "noisy figures," and discussed the draft with them privately before the meeting. This procedure is called "*nemawashi*" in Japanese. As Keeley (2001) mentions, "before any formal meetings are held to address a given issue[,] informal discussions take place as the first steps in building a consensus through a process known as *nemawashi*" (p. 149). In addition, these senior social workers did not engage directly in a serious discussion with the noisy figures, but rather they pretended to do so in order to gratify their pride by saying, "You are especially important to us, so we want your advice." By giving the noisy figures the chance to sound off about the draft before the meeting, the senior social workers ensured that they would be quiet when it mattered.

What surprised me was the strategy the senior social workers used to keep the noisiest figure quiet. They actually conspired to encourage the council members to ask him to be the chairperson of the department of social welfare. The chairperson's position was voluntary, and he would not be paid, but according to the social workers, if he took up that position he would have to keep *silent*, because as the chair, he would have to listen to the opinions of others. This was very likely to happen, because in Japan, a leader is expected to be a harmoniser of the group rather than an active and strong leader[1]. Being so satisfied with having a high position he would be more cooperative with the social workers. As one of them pointed out, the man in question wanted to become the chairperson of the whole council, so he would consider the chairpersonship of the department of social welfare to be an important step toward that. As a result, the meeting went on very quietly with few questions and little discussion. In fact it was dull and boring, but my supervisor greeted me afterwards with a smile, saying, "Hey, the meeting went very well. All parts of our

[1] "When the group functions harmoniously in Japanese society, which it does to an impressive degree, the distinction between the group leader and the members of the group become somewhat blurred. The leader is not the boss, in the usual meaning of the word. Instead, the leader is the harmonizer whose responsibility is to bring about a general consensus of the group." (Duke, 1986, p. 194)

plan are now accepted. Didn't you enjoy it? Remember, boy, every successful meeting goes like this." Using the same logic, I believe that it is likely that some voluntary organisations in Japan have their most difficult members in the top positions, but this is almost impossible to prove.

I do not know whether this way of choosing a leader is common practice in Japanese voluntary organisations, because it is usually done completely behind closed doors, and only deeply involved insiders know about it. For example, about a decade after the experience mentioned above, I participated in a meeting of another social welfare council as "a member of learning" and as the vice-chair of the meeting. I did not know what happened behind closed doors, because I was not an insider despite my vice-chairpersonship. In Japan, it is very common for a university professor to be seated as a figurehead of such a meeting of a non-profit organisation. What I saw was a very quiet meeting with very few questions asked or comments made. I have since attended several general assemblies of non-profit organisations both as a member and a mere observer, and in many cases, they were also very quiet affairs. In fact, they were nothing more than a ritual - what the Japanese call "*Shan-shan kaigi*" ["clap clap" meetings]. There were no substantial discussions, hence I believe that before these assemblies opened, all the controversial issues had been solved through "*nemawashi*" mentioned above.

Interestingly, this quiet meeting syndrome was behind a recent political scandal, which was mentioned in the editorial of a Japanese newspaper:

> In June 2001, the first government-sponsored town meeting . . . was held to promote direct dialogue between the people and Cabinet ministers. So far, there have been 174 such meetings. But a report by a Cabinet Office investigation panel shows that most were a sham to manipulate public opinion in favor of government policies. In 105 of such meetings, people were planted to ask questions or make statements. In 15 meetings, bureaucrats pre-arranged questions asked by participants. . . . A gratuity of 5,000 yen was even given to 65 people picked to asked questions at 25 town meetings. (Political theater, 2006)

Although this editorial criticised the practice by saying "town meetings became rigged theatres to increase support for the . . . administration," it might be more accurate to state that such manipulated meetings occur widely throughout Japan. Another example of a quiet meeting in Japan can be seen in the world of finance. "The general meetings of Japanese corporations are mostly perfunctory. They usually last no more than 30 minutes because most of the shareholders submit their proxy to the management and hence the issues proposed by the top management are quickly agreed" (Kono, 2001, p. 56). Such a meeting is called "clap clap" for the ritualistic and approving applause of every item on the agenda by "a largely passive crowd of investors" (Slowdown in Japan, 2003).

After many Western social institutions were introduced into Japan in the late 19th century (Westney, 1987), people began trying to run their meetings in a way that they considered "modern." However, they seemed to have adopted nothing more than the "forms" of meetings. Consequently, they developed a "Japanese-style" meeting, and now Japanese people are probably unaware of their different style. Although they may appear on the surface to be the same as Western-style meetings, the most important part, the way of discussing issues, is very different. Although the appearance is the same and the essence

is different, this should not be considered a failed attempt at copying Western culture. On the contrary, we should be aware of a trait of Japanese culture: sticking to "learning the proper form," which the American author, Condon (1984), describes as follows:

> The suffix "-do" as in *judo, kendo, bushido* means "the way," but the idea of a correct "way" extends far beyond traditional martial arts or flower arranging or calligraphy in Japan. There is a right way to exchange condolences, a right way to greet one's superior and a right way to greet the new year, and a right way to offer a drink, accept a gift and decline a compliment. (p. 17)

This tradition of sticking to "a right way" is firmly entrenched among present Japanese people. Last month I saw an electronic message board in a subway train, which asked passengers this question: "Which is the right way of handing over a gift that is inside a new paper bag given by a shop: take it out of the bag and give it, or give it with the bag?" A cultural supposition is that such paper bags are usually beautiful and are useful in making the gift appear more expensive. Another interesting question I saw on a similar subway message board was about positions within an elevator. It pointed to the four corners of the elevator and asked: "Which corner is the highest position, the second highest, the second lowest, and the lowest?" What this message was showing was, in fact, "the right way" for new young employees to yield to their superiors. A person of the lowest rank should take the lowliest position, the front of the switch board, as soon as possible; otherwise he or she would look foolish. To be honest, I was not sure what "the right answers" were to these quizzes, although I have been living in Japanese society as an adult for about thirty years. However, my reaction to these quizzes, as an ordinary Japanese, was not "Silly questions! Who on earth has the authority to ask such thing?" but rather it was "It's really a shame not to know the right answers!"

In sum, the "quiet meeting" episodes imply at least three things to researchers on self-help organisations in Japan: firstly, observing meetings might be nothing more than observing a ritual, although such a ritual has many meanings. No conflicts or no controversial issues are likely to be revealed. Everything is sorted out beforehand. When we hear the opening statement, we know that it is all over. Secondly, important things about the organisation might be shared by only a small number of core leaders if their general meeting is so perfunctory as to offer little information on the organisation to ordinary members. Thirdly, we should be careful not to believe in appearances, because they might not reflect the essence of the organisation. For example, even if an organisation has a lot of internal conflicts, its meetings could proceed very quietly. Let me repeat that even though some Japanese organisations appear to be the same as Western self-help organisations, they can operate quite differently. This is not always the result of miscopying a Western culture; it could well be an expression of the Japanese' appreciation of "form" or "the right way" of doing things.

Unreliable public documents

If a meeting does not provide important information about the organisation, how can we

expect that the organisation will publish reliable documents? In an interview with a patient organisation, I asked how Doctor A helped the organisation, because he was repeatedly praised as a great benefactor in their many publications. I was shocked to hear a leader assert that the good doctor had contributed "very little." If this were the case, why did they praise him as their greatest contributor? Does it mean that their documents contained "lies," or was the leader telling me a lie, simply because she did not want to acknowledge the doctor's contributions in my interview? I had many more questions, but I stopped asking them because I was afraid that pointing out the contradictions between their documents and the leader's answer might lead to a violation of one of their organisation's taboos. I assumed that the booklets included only *tatemae* (principles, words for the public) about the doctor.

Another episode that made me suspicious about the trustworthiness of public documents produced by self-help organisations occurred when I accidentally found very similar passages in the commemorative publications of two different organisations for people with physical disabilities. These passages told how these organisations were established, and although there should have been several similarities between the two organisations because of their similar social and historical backgrounds, it was clear to me that writers of one of these organisations compiled their document merely by changing some of the key words in the other organisation's publication. Their organisation had a closed, embedded relationship with the local government, which I will elaborate on later, and I suppose that they needed to publish their commemorative book within a fiscal year to use up their yearly budget, hence they had insufficient time to write their own version. This kind of organisation has to use their yearly budget within a fiscal year by any means available to them, otherwise the following year's financial support that they get from their local government will be reduced.

A third episode is about divided organisations; that is when organisations that have worked together in the past became separated from each other for some unknown reason. I know of two such cases: in one, the reasons for the split got very little coverage in their public documents, and in the other, the situation was described quite differently by each of the organisations involved. It was clear that what they were publishing in their documents was merely self-justification.

What does this mean for researchers of self-help organisations? I would suggest that first, we should not unquestioningly accept the documents produced by these organisations, because they may have published them merely to justify themselves, or they may have overstated their success to get social recognition. Some non-Japanese readers may think that this is a universal phenomenon that occurs in a wide range of organisations, but they are unlikely to know that many Japanese organisations publish documents under the supposition that their main readership is their own members and supporters, and not the general public. Therefore it is not important to include "objective" data on their organisation or to describe themselves "fairly." In the U.S. and Australia, however, such publications might be more oriented to the general public, because they consider the general public as a source of volunteers and donations. Japan does not have such a strong culture of citizens' donations. In fact, Chenhall was surprised to hear that the newsletters of Japanese alcoholics' organisations include personal confessions, because their Australian counterparts rarely do.

"Telling the truth" is differently weighed in different cultures

If few things are discussed in a meeting and all things are done behind closed doors, should we consider Japanese organisations to be highly secretive? If their public documents include very little valuable "objective" data for researchers and nothing more than self-satisfied or self-glorified stories, do their documents deserve researchers' attention? Before answering these questions, I would like to discuss how different people's attitudes towards "telling the truth" can vary significantly.

An anthropologist (Mulder, 1997) who conducted field research in the Philippines said, "In interviews, many people prefer to give the answers they think the researcher wants to hear" (p. 34). This is because the people "spend much attention to the avoidance of open, solidarity-threatening conflicts" (p. 33). This cultural trait can also be found among the Japanese, as a result of their efforts to maintain harmony in inter-human relationships. The following example is from my research experience with leaders of Japanese self-help organisations. When I conducted a group interview with these leaders, I often heard a strange usage of words: after one person gave her or his opinion, the others in the group often said, "Oh, I *absolutely* agree with you" and added their opinion, which did not necessarily agree at all with the previous person's opinion. This could be considered a form of word play that they used to show that they had no quarrel with one another despite the fact that they had some differences of opinion.

Additionally, I found that "the results of my qualitative interviews could be changed according to how the interviewees interpreted the social context in which the interviews took place" (Oka, 2003, p. 338). When I met group leaders for the first time, they told me a "good" story about their group. I suppose they were aware that their words might be read by their group members after my research paper was published. However, when I conducted a focus group interview, in which each of the interviewees came from different self-help organisations, they began to complain about the newcomers to their organisations, which helped them overlook their organisations' differences and gain a "we-feeling" as veterans in their field. When I interviewed leaders with whom I had had a long relationship, they revealed their inside stories to me to show that they trusted me. In doing this, they sometimes attempted to get me involved on their side if there were emotional conflicts within their group.

Hayashi and Kuroda (1997, p. 31) characterise Japanese and American cultures as having Rashomonesque (Rashomon-like) and Aristotelian worldviews respectively. Rashomon is "the title of an award-winning film produced by Akira Kurosawa. Its theme is that there are multiple truths" (p. 195). According to Hayashi and Kuroda, Japanese culture is distinguished by "ambiguity and diffuseness" (p. 17), while the Americans, whom they seem to consider a champion of Western civilization, have a "dichotomy in their worldview ([a] propensity to respond to the world in binary terms, as in 'Yes' or 'No.')" (p. 17). In the Rashomonesque world, the truth has many different aspects, and thus people can choose any aspects of this multiple-faced truth to please their conversation partners or to manipulate them. This does not mean that they have told lies as such; nevertheless this attitude towards telling the truth must be very irritating to some Westerners. I well remember a passage in the diary of Townsend Harris, the first United States Consul General to Japan, in which he

describes how, when talking with the Japanese diplomats, he was required to accept a slight deception:

> They [Japanese diplomats] said that, as the Treaty [of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Japan] was to be read by all the *Daimyo* [powerful feudal rulers] and great nobles, they did not wish to have it appear that every consul had the right to travel in Japan; that the words "on business" were proposed as a mere cover to conceal the extent of the rights actually conceded; and that no governor or other official should ever inquire into the nature of the business on which a consul might be travelling. I said that implied that the consul would be willing to tell a falsehood when he wished to travel and had no official business; that such conduct was not according to our customs; that a liar was looked on with the greatest contempt, besides which *it was a sin by our religion for a man to utter a falsehood* [italics added]. (Cosenza & Harris, 1930, p. 515)

I know that to quote from a diary of an American diplomat who was born over two hundred years ago might mean very little in a social science essay. However, I would like to stress the last words of that quote: "It was a sin by our religion for a man to utter a falsehood." This reminds me of a courtroom scene in a Hollywood movie where people swore on the Bible to tell the truth. For some Christian people at least, telling the truth is part of their religious practice. As far as I know, in Japanese culture, telling the truth has nothing to do with religion.

Exclusiveness blocks access to the inside

Another factor that makes it difficult to know the truth about Japanese organisations is their exclusiveness. Here the term "*ichigensan*" or "first timer" is of importance to field researchers in Japan. Although the term was originally used in the teahouses of Kyoto, it is now heard everywhere in Japan. As a newspaper reporter (Shoji, 2000) points out:

> In Kyoto . . . the teahouses make a clear distinction between the *ichigensan*, or "first timer," and *onajimisan*, "a frequent visitor." First-timers are told at the door - ever so gently - to leave, and could not hope to gain admission until accompanied by an *onajimisan* . . . Thus the secret world of Kyoto and its teahouses has remained intact through centuries - doors in Japan just do not open (p. 1)

Non-Japanese readers will be surprised to hear that up until relatively recently this term was also used among Japanese companies, who hesitated to do business with other companies that they did not know very well.

> Until as late as the 1980s, it was very common for Japanese companies to refuse to accept orders from customers, or to buy from suppliers, with whom they had not previously established an acceptable personal relationship involving introductions and a variety of social rituals designed to bind the two groups together. The syndrome still exists today . . . (De Mante, 2004, p. 101)

Thus a strong wariness toward first-timers has been shared even by commercial companies, which should pursue their financial interests unencumbered by such traditions. We can therefore imagine how wary of strangers our self-help organisations are[2]. Any first-time researchers will be refused entry as researchers, but they may be welcomed as a receiver of the group's PR leaflets, or as a mere visitor who is allowed to experience their facade or *tatemae* (principles), which I will write about later.

Not surprisingly, talking about communities' dark sides with outsiders was considered a taboo by traditional Japanese communities. Smith (1961) reports on ostracism in Japanese rural communities as follows: "The two offenses against the community which are most likely to lead to ostracism are exposing the community to a public loss of face and disturbing the peace and harmony of the hamlet" (p. 527). From observing Japanese hamlets shortly after the end of World War II, Kida (1967) identified "no showing the community's shame to outsiders" as one of the basic four laws of the hamlet. The other three were no hurting others with a knife, no burning others' houses, and no stealing. I remember well that a leader whom I interviewed about her organisation's issues said to me after the interview that she felt as if she had "sold her fellow members."

Although we might be able to take this as an outdated phenomenon, it is possible that present city-dwellers still maintain such principles as guiding rules for their lives. As Morita (1978) points out, Japanese city-dwellers can be regarded as those who left their hamlets, or those who "were expelled from their hamlets" (p. 163) and continue to follow the rules that were inherited from their hamlet lives. The Japanese traditionally have built their cities without walls (Sakaiya, 1993, p. 156)[3] and thus, as Yanagita's classic work (1929) states, there was a strong continuum between cities and villages in Japan. Dore's ethnography (1958) offered a good example of how Tokyo's city life resembled village life (p. 267). Gibney (1987) says, "In their hearts they [Japanese city-dwellers] remain villagers. In this sense Tokyo is not a city at all. It is a modular assembly of hundreds of villages clustering around and radiating from the big transport centers" (p. 61). Therefore, it is quite possible that people still follow the morals inherited from their pre-modern hamlet lives, even though people's relationships in communities are becoming more tenuous.

One way researchers might be able to overcome this exclusiveness is through gaining the trust of the leaders or gatekeepers of these organisations. However, a more perplexing issue is that even when the researchers succeed in entering deep inside an organisation, they may still find it difficult to get to the truth.

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[2] In other words, the Japanese consider "long-term relationships" very important. Graham and Sano (1984, p. 20) supposed that "the importance of establishing long-term relations is grounded in the cultural heritage of being isolated and having no other place to go" in Japan. This means that "leaving the field" (Taylor, 1999) may cause more difficult problems to Japanese field researchers than to others.

[3] A German traveller who visited Japan in late 17th century documented on Japanese cities as follows: "Most [cities] have no walls, ramparts, or moats, and their two gates are no better than those with which the individual streets are closed off at night" (Bodart-Bailey, 1999, p. 257).

Tatemae and honne; or surface and sentiments?

Tatemae and *honne* - this pair of words is often referred to when the exclusiveness of Japanese organisations is discussed[4]. Let me quote some passages from Yamamoto (1990), who describes *tatemae* and *honne* as follows:

> Tendency to present a proper appearance in order, for example, to avoid offending another; or, acting in accordance with expectations. The hostess yearns for compliments on her cooking. The seasoning is a bit salty for my taste, but I tell her it is just perfect. I show *tatemae*. . . . *Tatemae* is often a matter of tact: one represses real feelings (*honne*) and acts according to expectations in order to avoid confrontation, or causing offense and loss of face. *Tatemae* has negative connotations where it might mean rationalizing, having ulterior motives, or putting on a "front" to disguise one's real feelings and intentions. . . . [On the other hand, *honne* is] tendency to express one's actual feelings, intentions, or motives. If I had told the hostess that she should have gone more lightly on the salt, . . . I would have shown my *honne*. *Honne* refers to real feelings as opposed to what is expressed but not necessarily felt (*tatemae*). (p. 459)

While Yamaoto's explanation above is related to individuals' personal lives, Sugimoto's (2003) explanation is more applicable to organisational culture. He shows the contrast between *tatemae* and *honne* in the political scene as follows:

> *Tatemae* refers to a formally established principle which is not necessarily accepted or practiced by the parties involved. *Honne* designates true feelings and desires which cannot be openly expressed because of the strength of *tatemae*. If *tatemae* corresponds to "political correctness," *honne* points to hidden, camouflaged, and authentic sentiment. Thus, an employee who expresses dedication to his company boss in accordance with the corporate *tatemae* of loyalty and harmony, may do so because of his *honne* ambition for promotion and other personal gains. (p. 28).

Tatemae was a helpful concept when I asked leaders of parents' organisations about why they were suffering from a shortage of volunteers. Many of them pointed to their members' difficult situation: they all had ill children whom they had to take care of, so they could not work as volunteers. However, this could be regarded as their *tatemae*, because in Yamamoto's words this alleged reason was useful to "avoid confrontation, or causing offense and loss of face." It is also congruent with Sugimoto's description of *tatemae*, because the members' statements of support for other members experiencing difficulties by taking care of ill children are "politically correct." However, their reasoning includes a contradiction: the leaders were also parents who took care of ill children and faced difficulties in their lives. Did they think they were not as busy as the other parents? Although this question was raised in my mind, I did not dare ask it, because I knew that pointing out

[4] The pair of words, *honne* and *tatemae*, has been discussed in many books and papers. There are similar pairs of Japanese terms are: *ura* [rear] and *omote* [front], *uchi* [inside] and *soto* [outside], *ninjo* [human feelings] and *giri* [social obligations], and they are closely interrelated. See, for example, Bachnik and Quinn (1994), Doi (1973, 1985), Mitsubishi Corporation (1988), and Smith (1983).

the contradiction would have embarrassed them.

Only after gaining people's deepest trust will you be privileged to hear their *honne*. Moeran (1998) has linked the pair words, *tatemae* and *hone*, with out-groups and in-groups in describing his research experience with the Japanese:

> The Japanese in general make a vital distinction between what they call *tatemae* and *honne* . . . . *Tatemae* refers to the language which is used in public as a matter of 'principle'; *honne* to words that 'come from the heart' and express an individual's innermost, private feelings. It is this distinction which ultimately clarifies the relationship between group and individual in Japanese society, for *tatemae* is the language of out-group, and *honne* that of in-group, communication. I soon discovered that it was during drinking sessions that my informants shifted from *tatemae* to *honne*, . . . There appeared to be no taboos concerning subject-matter and, as the evenings wore on and the sake flowed faster, so I found myself listening to men talking about subjects which, during daylight hours, they had either refused to discuss or had evaded with an embarrassed laugh. At the same time, I discovered that some of the answers which I had received during the normal course of interviews were directly contradicted by these same informants as we drank together. As a result, I soon found myself paying frequent visits to the lavatory so that I could jot down in my notebook revelations which oncoming alcoholic inebriation threatened to - and sometimes did - erase. (p. 244)

However, although we should admire this researcher's remarkable collection of *honne*, we need to remember that *honne* is directly connected to actual feelings and sentiments, as Yamamoto (1990) and Sugimoto (2003) mentioned above, and that expressing feelings and sentiments is different from telling the truth. For example, in the section entitled "unreliable public documents," I mentioned a leader who told me that Doctor A had had no close relationships with her organisation, despite the fact that their numerous books and booklets referred to him as a great contributor. Because I believed that I had her trust, I took her remarks as her *honne*. This means that her statement was based on her real feelings and sentiments, and thus might include exaggeration or bias, or it could reflect her intention of keeping me away the doctor. In other words, after gaining an interviewee's deep trust, the researchers will have a chance of hearing their *honne*, but this could give rise to another dilemma in their research. If they include what the *honne* says as a reality, their research results might be distorted by the interviewees' sentiments or intentions. If they treat what the *honne* says as nothing but mere sentiments, the interviewees will be upset because they will think that the researchers did not trust them.

In Japanese self-help organisations, their bylaws and mottos are often nothing more than *tatemae*. These bylaws demonstrate how members should behave or how they want others to see themselves, and not how they actually behave. For example, while a self-help organisation's *tatemae* clearly declares that all the members are equal, we have observed that the organisers of regular meetings seat the participants carefully and adroitly according to their in-group hierarchy and in accordance with the need to provide appropriate hospitality to their guests. In Japanese culture, rooms have a hierarchical structure, with the location farthest from the door having the highest value, so this is where the leader of an umbrella organisation was seated. In descending order of rank came the leaders of other groups under the same umbrella organisation, leaders of their own group, guests,

rank-and-file members, members' families, and lastly, the tea-servers and volunteers, who were seated at the lowest position, next to the door. In fact the tea-servers showed their hospitality and humbleness by taking the lowest spot.

Despite the unreality of *tatemae*, I disagree with some authors who regard *tatemae* as mere "surface presentation" or "words done for appearance' [*sic*] sake only" (Nelson, 1997, p. 243). *Tatemae* can be a very important key to helping us understand how a self-help organisation functions. For example, one day Chenhall and I joined a regular meeting of a self-help organisation for alcoholics, and he found that some attendees' comments were very brief. In fact, they consisted of only one sentence, and that was taken from among their organisations' mottos, like "I will keep my sobriety for today." Their way of speaking was mechanical or ritualistic, without showing any emotion. I believe that all present knew that these people were telling *tatemae*. As a volunteer who had been involved with alcoholics' groups for a long time, I well understood that newcomers could not truly believe that they would remain sober, and that they were, in *honne* (real feelings), desperately thirsty, so they needed to repeat *tatemae* (principles), and their *tatemae* was accepted by the others as if the statements had come from their hearts. In this way, *tatemae* can be therapeutic.

Embedded and district-inclusive organisations as a cultural model

Lastly, I would like to introduce an interesting concept that might be useful for understanding the difference between Japanese self-help organisations and those in the US and Australia. Haddad (2006) points out that Japanese society is often characterised by its low rate of voluntary participation compared to US society, and argues:

> Current studies of comparative civil society have been systematically biased in favor of the types of volunteer participation found commonly in the United States and against those commonly found in Japan. In particular, studies have not reported participation in organizations such as PTAs or neighborhood associations that are prevalent in Japan. Because these volunteer organizations have close, embedded relationships with the government, they have often been overlooked in studies of civil society. Because Japan is not the only country where this kind of participation is prevalent - people in Spain and Germany volunteer in patterns similar to Japanese - a more detailed and inclusive conceptualization of volunteer organizations that make up civil society is necessary to understand participation patterns around the world. (p. 1221)

Many Japanese self-help organisations also "have close, embedded relationships with the government," yet they have seldom been studied. One of the few studies was done by me, in which I studied self-help organisations for ex-servicemen with physical disabilities, the war bereaved, widows, and elderly people, mainly by reviewing books and leaflets published by these organisations (Oka, 1991). One of the serious organisational issues for groups that have embedded relationships with the government was, and continues to be, *amakudari*, which the above Haddad's paper did not mention. *Amakudari* is well described by Kingston (2004):

> *Amakudari* (literally, 'descent from heaven') is the euphemism used to describe life after retirement for bureaucrats, when many assume well-paid sinecures in firms that they had previously supervised. . . . Bureaucrats who anticipate cashing in on their connections after retiring have a strong incentive not to alienate future employers and thus tend to be accommodating and supportive of those they are meant to monitor. . . . Retirement need not mean cessation of influence: firms hire former high- and even middle-ranking bureaucrats because of their established networks and connections with former colleagues who can exercise their discretionary powers to benefit the retired official's new employer. Banks and stock brokerages favor former Ministry of Finance men and pay them handsomely - but not because of their business acumen or savvy about hedging strategies; it is all about channels of communication, contacts, and a chance to influence critical decisions via the 'old boy' network. . . . . Civil servants contacted by their former *sempai* (one with organizational seniority) to provide information, grant access, and accommodate input on policies, do so because it is established practice and also because it generates favors that can be called in when seeking a cushy post-retirement position for oneself. (pp. 99-100)

Although this quote discusses the case of business, *amakudari* is often seen in voluntary organisations, including self-help organisations, because as Schwartz (2003) states, "In the provision of social services, . . . the state is 'highly involved' in Japanese voluntarism" (p. 18; see also Yamauchi, Shimizu, Sokolowski & Salamon, 1999, p. 249). While *amakudari* in large organisations is likely to get public attention, *amakudari* in small organisations, including most self-help organisations, receives much less public scrutiny, and as far as I know, there have been no surveys on this issue in self-help organisations. However, while conducting a series of interviews[5], I was informed about a case of a self-help organisation in which an ex-bureaucrat was the bureau chief. Apparently he was doing nothing but reading newspapers, because he had so little knowledge about his organisation's issues that he could not work[6]. His salary was absurdly high, while those of the social workers employed by the organisation were much lower than the average salary of people with the same educational background. Despite these irrationalities, he was employed because the organisation knew that his connections with the related Ministry would bring financial and political benefits.

In addition to the embedded relationships with the government, there is another element that characterises some of these Japanese organisations: district-inclusiveness, which means that people concerned in a certain issue and living in a certain district will be given membership automatically. In other words, the "organisations should attempt to include all eligible persons in a specific district" (Oka, 2003, p. 26). This automatic membership system is found in many Japanese non-profit organisations, including neighbourhood

[5] Unfortunately, I have not been able to publish the results of the interviews, because it seems to be almost impossible for me to keep the anonymity of the organisation.

[6] In Japan this kind of person is called *hiru-andon* [a lamp in broad daylight]. He or she is "a person whose presence or existence is not regarded as important" (Mitsubishi Corporation, 1988, p. 48). Strangely, in Japan, some people think that such a person can be a good top leader. A book by Mitsubishi Corporation (1988) states, "in many cases a Japanese organization operates better when its head is a person who does not stand out but who has a *kiremono* (sharp and able man) as his *futokoro-gatana* or chief of staff. In such a case, the top man [*sic*] is a symbol and the deputy or chief of staff holds the responsibility" (p. 49).

societies, PTAs, and all the self-help organisations discussed in my paper mentioned above (Oka, 1991). However, we have to be mindful of these groups' *tatemae*, which will deny the existence of automatic membership. In their *tatemae*, all membership is definitely voluntary. This *tatemae* made an ethnographer write about Japanese neighbourhood societies as follows: "In principle membership is both voluntary and universal. [Neighbourhood society] leaders say that no one is forced to join, while noting that no households refuse to belong. Both statements are probably true" (Bestor, 1989, p. 165).

Some readers might be critical of my discussion of these organisations with automatic membership and/or embedded relationships with the government, because numerous self-help organisations have recently been established without automatic membership or any relationship with the government. However, one must ask where these new-type or "modern" self-help organisations learnt how to operate themselves? By reading translated books on self-help groups? I can give a strong "no" to this idea, because as a writer of a translated book on self-help groups, I know that the number of copies of translated books and books with "modern" ideas about self-help organisations is far smaller than the number of people who actually work for "modern" self-help organisations in Japan. It has not been from these books, but from their own experiences of groups in their communities that they have created their own ways of operating self-help organisations. Japanese self-help organisations have been created, not by copying Western self-help organisations, but by applying Western concepts to their traditional group experiences: As Westney (1987) points out:

> Since the environment in which the organizational model was anchored in its original setting will inevitably differ from one to which it is transplanted, even the most assiduous emulation will result in alterations of the original patterns to adjust them to their new context, and changes in the environment to make it a more favourable setting for the emerging organization. (p. 6)

In other words, even the most recently established Japanese self-help organisations are unlikely to be operated without any cultural influence from traditional-type voluntary organisations. I refer now to what Ashkenazi (1991) calls "cultural modelling." He explains:

> [The] neighborhood organizations can serve as models for other forms of organization and for managerial practices in other circumstances. Examination of such models is necessary both for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese management in the Japanese corporate world, and for predicting the directions in which management is likely to go, or not go, in the corporate world in the future. (p. 385)

What I would like to stress is that this cultural modelling has also been done by self-help organisations in Japan. Japanese self-help organisations have a cultural prototype that might have its roots in Japanese hamlets, while Western self-help organisations might have the church as their cultural model (see Hurvitz, 1976). If two organisations that are called "self-help organisations" are very different from each other, their differences might stem from the differences of the two organisations' cultural models. Nevertheless with modification and, in Japan, with an abundance of *tatemae*, Japanese self-help organisations

can make themselves look identical to their Western counterparts.

Conclusions

Are Western and Japanese self-help organisations quite different entities that go by the same name? My answer is "they are." However, this answer is not meaningful in terms of a social science essay, because every organisation has its idiosyncrasies, and self-help organisations are no exception. The important question is how we should use these differences to enrich concepts and develop theories about self-help organisations. To date, many important concepts and theories about self-help organisations have been invented by Westerners, especially Americans, so if in our study we shave off the parts of Japanese self-help organisations that are not well understood using Western-made concepts and terms, we will have a very "thin" result. I therefore suggest that social scientists follow the example of botanists, who have developed theories about plants by studying them in various environments, and expand the concepts and theories around self-help organisations by researching the many different varieties that are evolving in a diversity of cultures.

Part II: Culture, organisations and the dynamics of anthropology

In the *Free Management Library*, an online library directed to non-profit and profit organisations, McNamara defines organisational culture in the following way:

> Basically, organizational culture is the personality of the organization. Culture is comprised of the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs (artifacts) of organization members and their behaviors. Members of an organization soon come to sense the particular culture of an organization. Culture is one of those terms that's difficult to express distinctly, but everyone knows it when they sense it. For example, the culture of a large, for-profit corporation is quite different than that of a hospital which is quite different than that of a university. You can tell the culture of an organization by looking at the arrangement of furniture, what they brag about, what members wear, etc. - similar to what you can use to get a feeling about someone's personality (McNamara, 1997-2006)

Culture has been a concept that has been immensely popular in the organisational field, however there have been little indication that the concept of culture has come any further than the familiar discourses prevalent in the fields of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. In fact, the above definition bares striking resemblance to the many found in any undergraduate textbook in Anthropology. For example Bates and Ploag (1990, p. 7) define culture in the now familiar Boasian tradition as a "system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning." Here, culture is viewed a bit like a Doctor's medicine bag, the contents of which will aid individuals to "cope" with each other and what the world throws at them. At least in their definition they note that cultures are learned and are capable of being passed on through time. In McNamara's definition, culture is something implicit to an organisation, felt but

not necessarily understood. Expressed in the "personality" of the organisation, this becomes evident by such things as furniture arrangement and members' clothes. This is not a complex definition and would probably be found to be problematic by organisational researchers who would want to search for culture beyond the furniture and dress styles of any particular organisation.

There is no single definition for organisational culture. The topic has been studied from a variety of perspectives ranging from disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, to the applied disciplines of organisational behaviour, management science, and organisational communication. Some of the definitions include:

> A set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people that are largely tacit among members and are clearly relevant and distinctive to the particular group which are also passed on to new members. (Louis, 1980, p. 40)

> A system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting . . . that serves to relate human communities to their environmental settings. (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 219)

> Any social system arising from a network of shared ideologies consisting of two components: substance - the networks of meaning associated with ideologies, norms, and values; and forms - the practices whereby the meanings are expressed, affirmed, and communicated to members. (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 33)

These definitions give us some idea of the two views that exist in the application of the culture concept to the study of organisations. The first point of view, constructs culture as implicit in social life. Culture is what naturally emerges as individuals transform themselves into social groups as tribes, communities, and ultimately, nations. The second point of view sees culture as an explicit social product arising from social interaction either as an intentional or unintentional consequence of behaviour. In other words, culture is comprised of distinct observable forms (e.g., language, use of symbols, ceremonies, customs, methods of problem solving, use of tools or technology, and design of work settings) that groups of people create through social interaction and use to confront the broader social environment (Wuthnow & Witten, 1988). This second view of culture has been most relevant to the analysis and evaluation of organisational culture and to cultural change strategies that organisational leaders have employed to improve organisational performance.

Recently however there has been critique that the fields of anthropology and organisational studies have grown apart and that there are relatively few good recent anthropological studies of organisations (Bate, 1997). As such the majority of qualitative studies of organisational culture are based on rapid methodological approaches rather than systematic long-term longitudinal studies involving self-immersion, self-reflexivity and participant observation. As Bate notes, "Organisation anthropologists rarely take a toothbrush with them these days. A journey into the anthropological bush is often little more than a safe and closely chaperoned form of anthropological tourism" (p. 1150). Anthropological research takes too long, is too costly and the results are often not published for some time after the initial fieldwork. As a result, the organisational perspective has

been criticised as "ahistorical, acontextual and aprocessual" in its approach and outlook (p. 1155). According to Bate (1997), anthropological analyses should not only focus on these dimensions but also give readers a sense "of being there," whether it be the central docks in London, a large hospital in Tokyo or a police department in Los Angeles. In order to understand process and change, studies should also focus on the everyday actions, however mundane and non-exciting they may be, of organisational members. In this way, an anthropological synthesis may reveal things we did not know about organisational processes and the implicit understandings and practices of organisational members.

Another important element is allowing organisational members to speak for themselves in the texts researchers produce. In allowing for different viewpoints or "multivocality" anthropologists aim to reveal the multidimensionality and complexity of members' understandings and participation in organisational life. However, Bate also reinforces the point that anthropological analyses must provide "insightful descriptions," rather than offering a rambling series of various stories and anecdotes, allowing readers to comprehend something that was previously unclear or misunderstood. While culture is a complex topic, it is one that is inherently wrapped up with being human. Thus methodological approaches to examine culture, whether in a small regional community or in a large self-help organisation, need to examine the complexities of participation in the community or organisation taking into account socio-economic, historical, processual and structural perspectives.

Japanese self-help organisations

It is with the above summary in mind that I turn to Part I of this paper. In that part, Oka discusses some of the central issues confronted by researchers who conduct research within self-help organisations in different cultural contexts. I took two important points from his discussion, first that self-help organisations across different cultures, while using the same words to describe their processes, may, in fact, place different meanings and practices associated with these common labels. As Oka explains even though groups in Britain, Australia, the USA and Japan are labelled self-help groups, the historical, economic, political and social contexts in which they evolved and are enmeshed are vastly different. Oka argues that to assume similarities based on equivalence in terms would be a mistake. By way of example I will provide one comparative example from my own work in an Australian Aboriginal drug and alcohol organisation.

The second focus of Oka's part concerns the researcher's access to individuals within Japanese self-help organisations and the importance placed on relationships between organisational members and researchers rather than the actual content of any information passed between individuals. This presents difficulties for researchers who wish to understand and gain understanding of Japanese self-help groups beyond the official view presented in meetings, publications and by its members to outsiders. Even when good relationships are established, Oka describes that individuals may be motivated to express various subjective sentiments to researchers which may not necessarily rest in any objective sense of "truth." In extending Oka's discussion, I would like to give a further example from my own work with Aboriginal Australians, demonstrating that short-term

methodologies may be inappropriate in some contexts, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. In Australia, there have been changes to research practices with a strong emphasis on ethical and participatory action approaches to project development and activity.

Australian Aboriginal alcohol and drug treatment organisations

My own background is as an anthropologist where I have worked with various Australian Aboriginal organisations, who provide residential alcohol and drug treatment services for Aboriginal people (see Chenhall, 2007). Indigenous Australians make up approximately 2.4% of the Australian population representing an heterogeneous group of people living in geographically different areas throughout Australia (ABS & AIHW, 2003, p. 43). The research literature on Indigenous substance misuse is abundant, however it is relevant to summarise a few key points (see for instance Saggers & Gray, 1998). While at the population level, substance misuse in Indigenous society is low when compared with the non-Indigenous society, when rates of use are compared, Aboriginal people use mood altering substances more frequently and in greater quantity than non-Indigenous people (Brady, 1991). The effect of such harmful levels of consumption has been disastrous for many communities and there has been a general "speaking out" about the costs of alcohol and other drug misuse (see Saggers & Gray, 1998, p. 12). One response to Indigenous substance misuse has been the creation of Indigenous controlled and operated residential treatment centres. First established in 1974, the first of these was called Benelong's Haven. This centre was established by an Aboriginal woman who had encountered Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in her own recovery from alcohol and drug misuse. Many of the older Aboriginal people I spoke with, who had been to AA meetings in the 1970s, commented on being conscious of their racial and socio-economic difference to the apparently well-dressed, well-spoken white Australians who would arrive in "flash cars and smart clothes." They described that they were keen to establish their own AA groups where Aboriginal people could feel comfortable participating in meetings away from the non-Aboriginal gaze. Benelong's Haven met this need. The centre houses anywhere up to 60 individuals at a time who come, often with their families, to attempt to make some changes in their lives. The program is rigorous and involves AA and psychotherapeutic groups. The social connections made, the stories people tell all contribute to "treatment" in the centre.

The AA approach is still one of the most commonly adopted models by Aboriginal residential treatment centres. During my own work in the treatment centre (see Chenhall, 2007), I encountered the Alcoholics Anonymous program which appeared to be very similar to non-Aboriginal AA meetings which are held around the country. The twelve steps and traditions are hung on the wall, the twelve steps were read aloud and individuals shared their stories about their substance misuse. By merely sitting and watching a meeting, an outsider might conclude that Aboriginal AA meetings were similar to any other. During the period of my two year long research in the centre, I witnessed many meetings, however more importantly I spoke to people about their understandings of the meetings and the AA philosophy in general. This included individual interviews, focus group discussions and informal discussions. What I found was that AA concepts were used to frame an Indigenous discourse concerning colonisation, disempowerment and powerlessness within

the larger society. AA also provided the tools through which participants could reconnect with their Aboriginal peers and their cultural heritage.

In Canada, the sweat lodge and the sacred pipe have become central symbols of "Indianness" in the treatment of substance misuse in rehabilitation centres and gaols. Traditional modes of treatment are placed against non-traditional ones, such as psychotherapy. Various government agencies and Indigenous groups in both North America and Australia heavily endorse the idea that programs should be "culturally appropriate." Nevertheless, programs such as Benelong's Haven continue to emphasise the importance of AA principles to Aboriginal cultural values. Does the use of AA treatment models by rehabilitation centres such as Benelong's Haven make them any less "cultural" than those that use other approaches? This, of course, assumes that it is possible to separate what is cultural and what is not. If an approach is deemed to have no cultural aspects then what does it have? All the symbols and markers of culture are in some sense invented, but for Indigenous programs what has become important is the underlying politics of difference. Culture becomes one dialogue through which Indigenous organisations claim difference to the approaches offered by the mainstream society.

Alcoholism and AA

Before understanding Aboriginal conceptions of AA, it is important to understand attitudes towards alcoholism more generally. For Aboriginal people at Benelong's Haven, alcohol and drugs were viewed as having removed the Aboriginal spirit, leaving them a fractured and divisive people. Residents asserted that if it were not for the introduction of alcohol and drugs by the first British settlers, Aboriginal people would never have lost their culture. With the forging of a shared identity through the formation of common goals and purpose, residents asserted that they were rediscovering their Aboriginal spirituality in the AA program. AA teachings support a discourse where alcohol and drugs become a poison that render the user powerless and threatens loss of life or mind. Rather than engaging in the lies and excuses that are said to be the common practice of individuals who engage in substance misuse, relationships in Benelong's Haven are based on a concept of self-exposure and moral truth. The formation of group solidarity within the centre is seen as the main avenue through which residents can alter their relationship with the world. One resident expressed this when he stated: "We gotta take the spirit out of the bottle and put it back between us." Of course the readjustment of residents' relationship with the world is the aim of many other rehabilitation centres. However in Benelong's Haven this was politicised so that residents' efforts to regain what has been lost took on a historical perspective that was viewed as part of a larger Aboriginal movement of self-determination. In this view, abstinence from alcohol and drugs was associated with a return to culture.

Various concepts found in AA were described as being aligned with Aboriginal core socio-cultural values. For instance "powerlessness" was associated with many Aboriginal Australians perception of loss of cultural ties, pride and dignity associated with colonization. Sharing stories and seeking treatment in groups was associated with the importance Aboriginal people placed on social groups as the prime site of individual experience. The "one day at a time" concept was compared with the nomadic lifestyle of traditional

Aboriginal societies. This was supported by the founders and current Director's comments that she treats Aboriginal drinkers "the Aboriginal way - in groups," as she finds that "Aborigines become alcoholics by drinking together in groups."

While I have explored this in depth elsewhere (see Chenhall, 2007), what I want to emphasis is that in this context simply viewing the meetings at face value gives very little information beyond the official AA view. However, by exploring participants understanding of AA through long-term participant observation, I was able to come to some understanding as to how individuals accommodated the AA perspective into an Aboriginal world-view.

Developing responsible and ethical relationships

In Australia, all research involving humans and animals must gain ethical approval through recognised ethics committee. For Indigenous Australian research, compliance to ethical guidelines are strictly reinforced and for good reasons. Many Aboriginal people have felt exploited by researchers who have built their careers by extracting information about them after giving very little in return. Researchers must demonstrate a number of criteria when conducting research with Indigenous people including written support from those involved in the research and evidence that their research is in line with the core values of spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection and responsibility (NHMRC, 2003). There should also be involvement of Indigenous people where possible in the early formative stages of research design to ensure that the research is appropriate and sensitive to local needs. Underlying this is the importance for researchers to build trusting and respectful relationships with individuals and their communities. As Oka describes this can be difficult in various contexts where organisations or communities maybe closed to outsiders for various reasons. And as Oka also highlights, once access is granted, individuals or organisations involved may in turn utilise researchers for their own strategic purposes. In my own experience of working with an Indigenous alcohol and drug organisation, the emphasis was on establishing relationships of trust over a considerable length of time and was demonstrated by my willingness to be involved in the organisation and use my skills where necessary. This ranged from helping the organisation compile reports for funding agencies as well as helping driving residents of the centre to various agencies outside the centre. As I was living in the centre as part of my participant observation approach, I had the time to be able to perform such duties as well as engage in my research. This also meant that I had to be very flexible when I did research and when I performed other duties. In terms of the kind of information people told me, again my anthropological approach to this research meant that I was able to talk with those people I had developed close relationships with in a number of different contexts. A good example of the different kinds of information received when employing different research methodologies can be illustrated when I first arrived to the centre.

Upon arrival the organisation requested that I provide assistance in collecting information related to the suicide ideation of male clients in the centre. The collection of this data was part of a national project they were involved in at the time related to suicide prevention. This involved performing a fairly standard psychometric test to residents. While conducting the short questionnaire with residents did establish my "researcher status" among the

clients, I was very aware that some of the residents were uncomfortable with some of the questions I was asking. I also felt uncomfortable asking some of the questions and would often make elaborate explanations and additions to the questions which I am sure most quantitative researchers would frown upon. Generally most of the questionnaires revealed that clients had very low suicide ideation. Staff at Benelong's Haven knew this to be incorrect as they had a history of residents past suicide attempts which gave a very different picture. After I had spent a year in the centre and had established close relationships with many of the residents, I discussed this questionnaire with some of the residents and asked them what they thought of the process. All of the residents I spoke with stated that they did not feel comfortable answering the questions, they were very personal and they did not have a close relationship with me. Even though the questionnaire was accompanied with a clear language statement and was not compulsory, residents stated that they answered the questions according to what they thought I wanted to hear. It was not until I had spent considerable time with clients that they felt comfortable telling me their personal stories on sensitive subjects. They knew I could be trusted, that I would not use the information to disempower their position and would always lend a friendly ear and supportive comments (and where necessary, suggest that they see a counsellor).

The kind of statements that individuals made to me on sensitive topics did change depending on the context we were in, whether others were present and what kind of emotional state they were in. However, what became essential to understanding the complexity of the relationship of an individual to their own sense of self and to those around them, was to explore these very differences in what people said in different contexts. It was not necessarily the case that one statement was more or less "true" than any others, but that they made them on the basis of a number of factors related to their own processes of identity formation. This does not necessarily make comparison impossible. By focusing on the *process* of individual's subjective truth making, as they relate to a number of contexts, it is possible to understand the kinds of decisions individuals make in giving out some information while holding back on others. In itself, this is a very central component of what makes us human beings. However, to understand such processes, a researcher needs considerable time to spend with various individuals in various contexts repeatedly. And all of this is based on building relationships of trust and ethical conduct with those at the focus of our research.

In Australian Indigenous research, research is increasingly become collaborative and participatory. A central component to projects may be to offer some kind of training, joint authorship or other service. The formation of research projects themselves involves a process of early consultation and collaboration between researchers and Indigenous communities. For example, my current research study in Australia focuses on developing appropriate evaluation strategies and performance indicators for a number of residential alcohol and drug treatment organisations. The specific focus of the research, the methodology and the outcomes were all determined collaboratively by organisational members and the researchers involved. The outcomes themselves were designed to have practical significance for organisations, for funding bodies and for research knowledge. These are: to increase understanding of key principles related to "best practice" for alcohol and drug treatment in residential treatment centres; to develop a collaborative network

between organisations to share information and treatment approaches; and to provide a better allocation of funding and reporting outcomes of treatment outcomes. A central element of this research has been to utilise a range of methodological approaches including ethnographic and interview methodologies alongside the collection of various quantitative data related to various outcomes. Through such triangulation of sources it is hoped that a combination of more subjective process information can be combined with outcome type data, leading to a more complex and nuanced understanding of Indigenous residential drug and alcohol services.

Conclusion

In responding to Oka's discussion I have not addressed his points specifically but to add my own reflections on some of the issues he has raised. The issue of cultural difference between organisational approaches to the way they deliver their services is an important one. In order to understand these approaches I have pushed for an anthropological approach to gather information that is processual, historical and self-reflexive. While access to the insider's perspective within organisations is fraught with many difficulties, I have argued this is possible, in some cases, by ensuring that organisations are part of the research design and planning and that time is allowed for the building of relationships of trust between the researchers and the individuals/organisations concerned. This of course may not always be possible. However in a time when researchers are increasingly asked to justify the practical significance of their research for those organisations, cultural groups or individuals they choose to make the focus of their studies, these are unavoidable points of consideration.

Acknowledgements

Originally I planned to invite two more American scholars, Dr. Thomasina Borkman of George Mason University, and Dr. James Mandiberg of Columbia University, to contribute to this paper, having already obtained their consent for a joint authorship. However, because of certain difficulties that led to a delay in writing my part, I was unable to ask them to join this paper early enough for them to have sufficient time to add their comments. I would like to apologise to them for my negligence. Thomasina Borkman encouraged me to write on this theme, stressing the relevance of rich literature on the voluntary sector to the study of self-help organisations. Although I have not yet conducted a systematic literature review in that area, she did provide me with a deep insight into the issues I have pondered over for a long time. James Mandiberg gave me a fresh perspective of organisational studies when we discussed the earliest draft of this paper. I really appreciate their cooperation and kindness. [Tomofumi Oka]

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