

ASIAN JOURNEYS

Asian Journeys: Conversations with Editors, Fieldworkers, and Scholars

Ed. Benjamin Dorman



Asian Journeys: Conversation with Editors, Fieldworkers, and Scholars

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Editor's Introduction

Benjamin Dorman



This e-book is based on transcripts taken from selected interviews conducted for Asian Ethnology Podcast between 2017 and 2021. Asian Ethnology Podcast was originally born out of an idea that occurred to me while conducting various exchanges with contributors and collaborators of *Asian Ethnology* or *Asian Folklore Studies* over the years.

When we receive submissions to *Asian Ethnology*, it goes without saying that after the processes of peer review, revision, and resubmission are complete for manuscripts that have been accepted for publication, the final published versions differ, sometimes significantly, from the original submissions. My co-editor, Frank J. Korom, and I are honored to be joining authors on the journey toward publication. Along the way, we often get the opportunity to learn about various trials the authors went through during fieldwork, including material that will never make the printed page. Similarly, we, as researchers and authors ourselves, know the feeling of having remarkable stories or anecdotes related to the research that will never make it to publication, sometimes for good reason.

Asian Ethnology Podcast, which involves in-person and online interviews, or more specifically, conversations, is an attempt to speak to and learn from scholars about their fieldwork or research anecdotes. When we select interviewees, we do not limit the field to those who have published in the journal or who



have had other connections with the journal (former editors and associate editors are included here). But their areas of interest coincide with some of those of the journal or resonate with Frank Korom and myself as editors and researchers. I often seek to ask interviewees about their personal motivations for engaging in research, something that does not always appear in journal articles.

Direct transcripts of conversations do not necessarily translate the same way in print as oral conversations do. And hardly anyone, when speaking, talks in perfectly formed grammatical sentences. Therefore, these conversations have been edited to conform with grammatical conventions but also maintain the spirit of the speakers' original intentions in the conversation. The materials that appear in the following pages are essentially versions of what was recorded at the time. Books being discussed had not appeared in print at that stage, and the pandemic was in its early phase. Although the eventual publications are mentioned, I have made no attempt to update what was discussed to fit with the current situation regarding Covid or any other significant changes since the date of recording.

From the time I began working with Peter Knecht as the associate editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*, I wanted to record his thoughts and recollections. Peter was one of my editorial mentors and the former editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*. I worked for him as associate editor of the journal from 2003 to 2006. Conversations with Peter were fascinating and sometimes extended over a period of months. He would weave in moments of sharp erudition from his prodigious and wide-ranging reading of books and articles, and memories of his own fieldwork or meetings with people he came across from all walks of his life. I always wanted to record his recollections of what he learned about the early years of the journal, his years working with the first editor, Mathias Eder, and his own experiences as the journal's editor. I'm very pleased that I am able to do this as a way of acknowledging his significant contribution to a journal that is now in its eighty-second year.

Scott Schnell was my first coeditor of *Asian Ethnology*, and he served in that capacity from 2008 to 2011. In the podcast interview we did not discuss the process leading up to changing the journal's name or the structure of the journal, including the decision to have coeditors for the journal—a move that has, in my opinion, been of enormous benefit to the journal over the past fifteen years. I wanted to focus instead on Scott's insights into his own fieldwork, which were always inspiring to me. I felt it important to include his latest research and reflections on previous work.

Clark Chilson was my predecessor as associate editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*, and his perspectives on editing and research have influenced me in many ways. Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader are colleagues who share with me an interest in Japanese new religions. We have collaborated on special issues of journals and edited volumes. Frank Proschan is a member of the *Asian Ethnology* international editorial board and was interviewed by Frank J. Korom. Susanne Klien, based at Hokkaido University, is an anthropologist who has worked on local ritual and urban migration in Japan. Thomas David DuBois, also a board member of the journal, has long supported the activities of the journal. Also included in this collection is his interview with a colleague with expertise in food studies, Jin Feng. Andreas Riessland, an anthropologist, is a colleague based at Nanzan University, who has worked on ritual and *bōsōzoku* (motorcycle tribes).

I wish to make special mention of Mark Bookman (1991-2022). Despite his very busy schedule, Mark was kind enough to interview a number of scholars for the podcast himself, and his conversation with Yoshiko Okuyama appears in this e-book. Mark and I worked closely on the Disability in Japan in the Digital Age project from 2020, which produced podcasts, webinars, and a booklet based on a lecture by Frank Mondelli.

When Mark passed away unexpectedly on December 16, 2022 at a young age, not only did the fields of Japanese studies and disability studies lose a rapidly rising star, the world lost a truly committed and compassionate activist whose life and work inspired many. I lost a valued colleague and collaborator and a dear friend who taught me so much. I dedicate this book to his memory.

I thank Frank J. Korom for his support of Asian Ethnology Podcast, and all those who agreed to be interviewed for the podcast and allowed me to include edited versions of the conversations in this e-book.

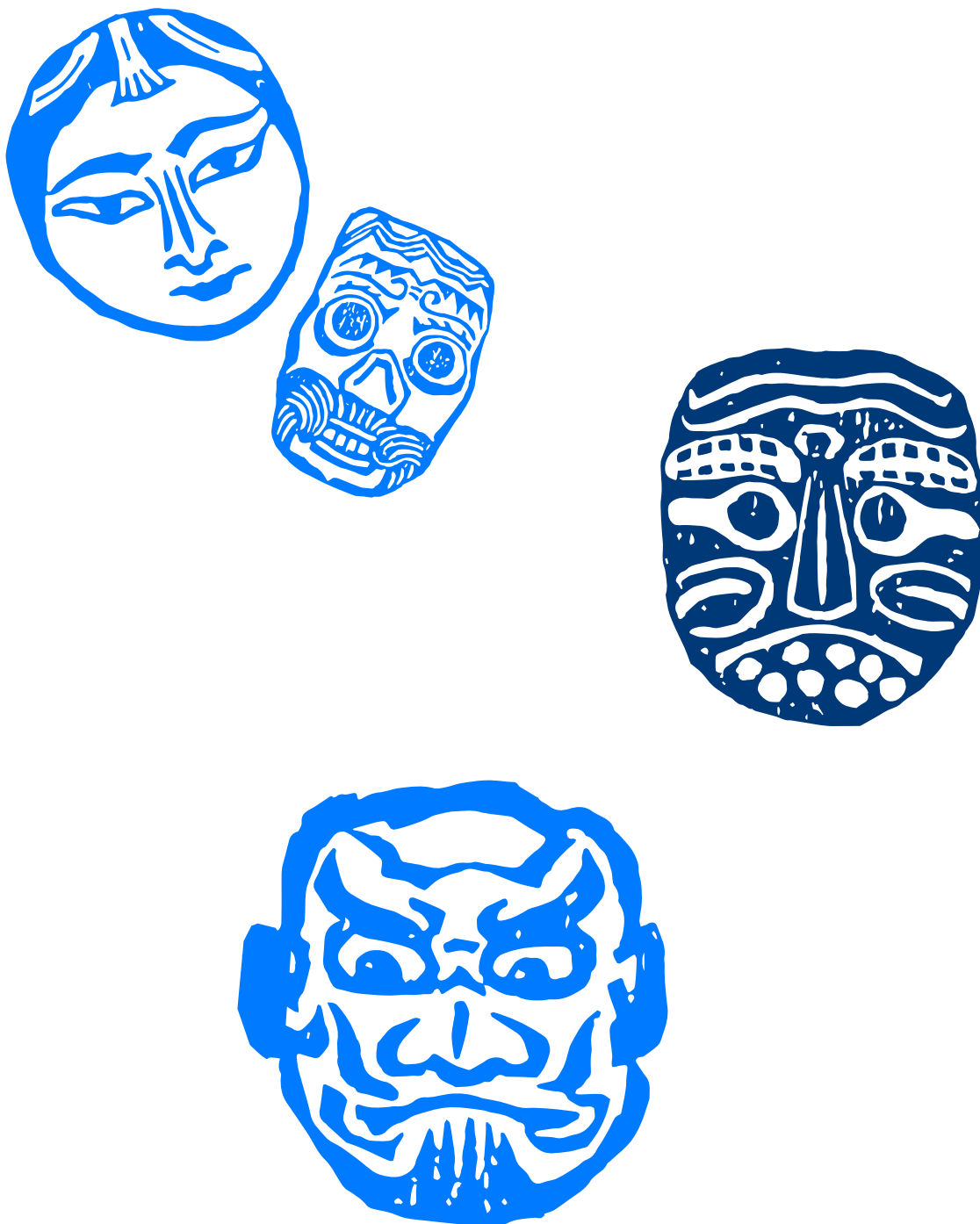
Thank you for your interest and support of Asian Ethnology Podcast and *Asian Ethnology*.

June 25, 2023

Benjamin Dorman

Coeditor, *Asian Ethnology*

Coordinator and producer, Asian Ethnology Podcast



Asian Journeys

The Beginnings of the Journal: From China to Japan

Peter Knecht



Peter Knecht was the editor of Asian Folklore Studies from 1980 until 2007.

Ben Dorman: I'd like to ask you about the beginnings of the journal in 1942. How was it founded, why, and by whom?

Peter Knecht: Let's start with Matthias Eder, an Austrian member of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), which is a missionary society. The Society had taken over Fu Jen University in Beijing. It was formerly run by the Benedictines, but they couldn't find the people anymore. They asked for somebody else to do it, and the SVD was charged to take over. By that time, Eder was still in Japan studying the language, which he did for about half a year. Then he went to Kanazawa to teach in a high school. He taught language, either German or English, I don't really quite know.

It was not to his liking, so he felt he would like to study and get some academic work done, instead of just teaching at a school. He eventually got permission to study and decided to study Japanese culture, with a special emphasis on linguistics. He went to Vienna, Paris, and ended up in Berlin at the end, where he wrote his thesis and got his PhD in 1938. That year he left for the Far East, to China. By that time the SVD had begun to direct Fu Jen University, so it was a natural place for him to go. He knew Japanese, but probably only a little Chinese. I don't know how much of it he learned, as we never talked about that. We took it for granted that he could speak Japanese, because he spoke either Japanese or German to us.



He started teaching ethnology there. For him, it was important from the very beginning that ethnology is a kind of academic work that does not rely exclusively on reading books and texts. He believed it was important to have contact with reality. One thing we can do is to go out and do fieldwork, or collect material, artifacts, and all kinds of things. That's what he did. He did not do fieldwork as we might call it now. He would go out, talk with people, look at what they had and what they did, and he asked them to explain what it was. He collected these items and brought them back to the university, with the idea that eventually something should be done by the university so that these materials could be accessible to the general public.

The university finally decided to grant him some space and money with which he could run a small museum. Of course, you cannot start with a large museum, so that's what he did. Fortunately, the rector of the time, Rudolf Rahmann, was himself an ethnologist or anthropologist. He was interested in the topic and the whole project, so he supported Eder. But he was very tough. It seems he and Eder sometimes had rather harsh discussions. Eventually, they got to the point where Eder could use a section in the university to establish a museum and locate the editorial office.

I'm not exactly sure when the museum was founded, but it was older than the journal by a few years. Eder came to Beijing in 1938, so there were only a few years between his arrival and when the first issue of the journal was finally published. He always thought the journal should be a publication of the museum, because he could have both the physical material that should be studied, and a place where the results could be published. This did not mean that only people working at the university or museum would be able to publish in the journal—anybody could. In fact, he wrote on the back cover that he accepted contributions in three languages, German, English, and French, but not Chinese or Japanese. He would make a Chinese summary at the end of an article, but none in Japanese. I don't recall seeing anything in the journal in Japanese.

He was interested in having the journal be a publication of the museum, to give it a face to the outside world. He wanted the journal to be a place where people could learn about Asian folklore, or where Asians learnt about European or Western folklore. He saw it as a place where ideas could be ventilated or exchanged between these two rather different worlds. That was his basic idea.

BD: In your obituary to Eder in *Asian Folklore Studies* (vol. 39, no. 2), you wrote about how he had always understood his work for the journal as his particular contribution to the missionary efforts of the religious order. Could you explain a little more about that, the background behind it, and whether any issues arose from his desire to do that?

Knecht: It was a personal reason, given his position in Japan as a member of a missionary society. He must have felt some sort of urge or obligation to show to his confrères that he was doing something for the religion, that he was not just a kind of parasite. I can understand this quite well, because I felt like that too. He had another idea, too, and he mentions this in his editorial. When Wilhelm Schmidt founded the world-famous *Anthropos* journal,¹ he insisted from the very beginning that missionaries contribute to the publication of this journal by writing articles and reports, because they are the people who stay in the culture for the longest time, much more than an ordinary anthropologist. They would know the language and customs.

He quotes Schmidt's journal, saying that the first article in *Anthropos* was about the contribution of missionaries to the study of anthropology. He argues that the readers can do this too, but people in China or Japan are not like the tribes of New Guinea, the Pygmies in Africa, or any of the indigenous cultures. We cannot take the same approach, he argues. But for the missionaries who work in cultures like Japan, China, or India, it is important too that they know the culture, and that they contribute the knowledge they gained to others who are outside the culture. He said we can promote the knowledge itself, and missionaries can be a kind of bridge to approach the culture. Once they get familiar with it, they can talk about their experiences, to the advantage of others.

He thought he would make an important contribution to the effort of the missionaries, because he was actually quite critical about the language competence of some of them. He never wrote about this.

According to his thinking, this was how he could contribute in an essential way to the missionary effort of the SVD and others.

BD: You mentioned Wilhelm Schmidt. He was a particularly influential figure, and Eder included a photo of him in the frontispiece of the first issue of the journal.

Knecht: It is a photograph and a Latin dedication to Schmidt. This was in 1942, during wartime, when Schmidt was a very influential yet controversial figure. He was a German and had worked in Vienna. He founded the journal *Anthropos* in Vienna, and eventually he had to flee the Nazis. He went to Rome. He was a good friend of the pope at that time, and the pope protected him.

Eventually Schmidt went to Switzerland, where he founded the Anthropos Institute. At that time, he was probably one of the most known German anthropologists, but not so much in the sense that everybody would necessarily follow his methods.

He was a polemic person. He would stir things up and fight with others. His method is problematic, but what he wanted to suggest is we cannot say that people who do not belong to so-called "high" cultures have no history. In German, they are called "*geschichtsloses Volk*," (a people without history), but this is nonsense. They have no history that is written down, but their life, the way they live, the place where they live itself has its history, and when we have the right eyes for it, we can read it. We can read it through the changes in social relations, for instance, the changes in work, the changes in the way in which people work together with nature, and all these things. That's what Schmidt wanted to do.

His system was far too formulaic. He'd say, "Everything has to be regulated." Many people said, "No, you can't do this. You don't have the proof for it, it's too much." Then when you go out into the field and look at the situation, it's not the way Professor Schmidt said it was. But he promoted this idea that even people we think have no history actually have a history, but it's of another type. Schmidt himself was a linguist from the beginning. That's why he could work in that way. He could show the changes within language when you see how a language develops, how it divides from a stem or another branch, forming a so-called tree. That's what he did with culture. It's quite an interesting method, where he tried to show that there were relations between people A and people B, although they are far apart by now.

That's what Eder somehow mentions when he speaks about the historical method or historical philological methods, which was Schmidt's idea. However, Eder doesn't specifically talk about Schmidt, probably also because this was the time of Adolf Hitler, in the midst of the war, and Schmidt was *persona non grata*. Eder would never talk about that. He couldn't stand Hitler, of course not.

BD: Schmidt?

Knecht: Schmidt was different. Schmidt is kind of ambiguous, but Eder not. Eder was definitely against Hitler. However, Eder may not have had a special method of searching for material or information. Later on, Eder wrote on Buddhism and Chinese religion, which is not necessarily how Schmidt thought about religion.

BD: When the journal was founded in 1942, it was in China where it remained for a period of seven years.

Knecht: Yes. By the time he founded the journal, Beijing was under Japanese rule, and the university was obliged to take a certain number of Japanese professors for their staff. This is one of the reasons he got into close contact with certain folklorists from Japan. One of them is Yanagida Kunio, and then Naoe (Hiroji). Naoe was a professor for quite a while in Beijing. There were some others, but I forgot their names. Some of them wrote later in the journal, and they attended *kenkyūkai* [research meetings]. Eder would run research groups, things like that. He had some sort of varied exchange and connection with them.

BD: Because he spoke Japanese, and he had lived in Japan before.

Knecht: Yes. For the Chinese, the Japanese were the enemy. This became more and more strong with the leftist groups around Mao. In 1949, Beijing was taken over, the new state was declared, and that was the end of the possibility of work for foreigners, especially missionaries. These professors at Fu Jen who were

members of the SVD or other religious groups had to leave. Some of them were put into prison, but not Eder. I don't quite know how he managed to get out. Anyway, they were put on a ship, but he could take along just a few books. He eventually brought them to Japan, and they ended up at Nanzan University. He came to Tokyo—because Nanzan did not exist at that time, it was just in the process of being founded—and there was no place to go.

BD: In your obituary to Eder, you described how the journal went through a series of rebirths. Any journal needs financial and, depending on the circumstances, institutional support to survive. The situation in China was clearly a major threat to the journal. What was the financial backing at the beginning, and how did this series of rebirths begin?

Knecht: In the beginning, the journal as well as the museum were paid for by Fu Jen University. This was part of the university, so it was a natural thing that the university paid for it. Another question is whether that was enough or not. But this did give him a place to stay and a certain security that he could publish a journal. He wrote, "It won't be a big journal, but we can publish about 120 pages once per year." When he came to Japan after the war, everything was destroyed. For instance, the Jesuits at Sophia University in Tokyo had a journal and still have, *Monumenta Nipponica*. *Monumenta Nipponica* could not be published for several years, because they couldn't get paper. It was rationed. For some reason, I do not know why, Eder managed to get enough paper right away to have the journal finished and published in Japan. There were actually two issues in 1949, for the same volume.

BD: That's interesting, because there was an intense paper shortage in that year, major newspapers couldn't publish, there were riots, strikes by journalists, and so on. It was a pretty eventful year. He managed to get the money.

Knecht: He often said the Jesuits were so angry, because they couldn't get the paper to publish their journal, and he got it, and he had just come from outside. Before the 1949 issue it says, "Published in Peking, China." If you look at those issues, he kept this up for several years, because he thought he could still go back to China one day—that the thing with Mao was just a temporary affair, it wasn't going to last, and so on. But the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) are still there today.

BD: Did he have some particular attraction to China then as opposed to Japan? He had experience in Japan. Did he mention to you that he would like to return to China, or the reasons why?

Knecht: He would have liked to return, yes.

BD: What was the reason?

Knecht: Because it's where he lived the longest and had all his work. They must have been ten years rather intensive years. Apparently, he did not believe that the communist movement would be such a big affair or that it would last. For about three years you can find Peking listed on the cover, and only after that it comes to Tokyo. In Tokyo, he had nothing. He was living in a small apartment. He started teaching at American schools. One was a branch of a US university located close to Tokyo, for the armed forces. Eventually the American School in Japan hired him as a Latin teacher. That was his income. With this, he was able to publish the journal.

BD: That raises an interesting point. You mentioned in your obituary about him viewing the journal as his own particular missionary contribution. Did the SVD see it in the same way?

Knecht: No.

BD: The order itself didn't have any particular view on that?

Knecht: This is a complicated question. The order founded and runs Nanzan University, so it's an academic institution. They have to take into account the fact that members of the society will teach at this university—not only theology or philosophy, but also literature, sociology, anthropology and other subjects. There was always some sort of friction between these two worlds. On the one side, you have fulltime missionaries in the parishes, and on the other side you have the people in the schools. Some may have

thought that those in the schools did not do missionary work. He did not think that way. He said, "Well, those in the parish, let them do their work. That's okay. I cannot do this. I'm not made for this." He decided to make the contribution he could make with a feeling of responsibility, and that was academic work. So that's what he did.

BD: Did anyone in the society express any particular interest in the journal at that time, or did they just let it go?

Knecht: For a while they just let it go. You also have to imagine that when he came to Japan, there was no academic institution within the Japanese SVD. The foundation of Nanzan was just fledgling, it was just a plan at that time. There was nothing big going on. But, the rector of the time, Alois Pache, was very interested in having this developed in connection with Schmidt. Schmidt wanted to have an anthropology institute in Japan already in 1935, but it didn't eventuate. It was impossible. They had no money, and then the war came, and it was all mixed up.

Pache said, "Listen, we have these famous people in anthropology, why don't we use them too?" That was the natural idea, but the community here in Japan was not at all prepared for that. Gradually, they had people coming from China, those people who were expelled from the university in Beijing. They came to Nagoya. They staffed a good part of the university in linguistics, sociology, literature, English, French, and anthropology.

BD: Going back to the question of the series of rebirths, in a sense he was on his own?

Knecht: Yes, at least from 1949 when he arrived to 1966, because in 1966 he was invited by Richard Dorson to come to Indiana University and run a course there. That's when they talked about the financial stabilization of the journal. Dorson made a deal with him and said, "Listen, we have so many students. If you agree to publish their work, for instance their graduation work, in the journal, you will have a steady flow of contributions, and I'll see to it that Indiana University pays for the journal for ten years."

BD: Richard Dorson had students from different Asian countries?

Knecht: Yes.

BD: That was the reason he approached Eder in the first place?

Knecht: Yes. The cost to Indiana University wasn't that big, because the journal wasn't published in America, it was published in Japan. At that time Eder published an issue for a small amount of money, much less than by the time I took over. He could do this. That's probably also the reason why he had enough money to publish with the income he gained himself by teaching. This was not a large amount either, but you have to imagine that in the forties, even the late forties or early fifties, there was no rapid economic growth in Japan. That came much later. Then everything got more expensive.

The first printer he had for many years until he came to Nagoya was a man hired by the Salesians, another missionary order. The Salesians have a large school in the west of Tokyo in Kokubunji, and their training for the children was not only academic but also trades. They had workshops on how to use timber, all kinds of things. One of these workshops was printing. They printed the journal for Eder. I met this man several times, his name was Shirai. When I was in Tokyo, he came to our house, picked up the manuscripts, and brought the first proofs over. That's how I got to know him. But as time went on, he became more expensive.

BD: As Japan's economy grew . . .

Knecht: Yes, and then when Eder came to Nanzan in the early 1970s, the university said, "No, we have to look for somebody else." That was the way they found Kenkyūsha. Although it was a well-established commercial printing company, Kenkyūsha was much cheaper than Shirai-san. The funny thing is Kenkyūsha was in fact the first printer Eder hired, but then they became too expensive. That's how he found this Shirai. Shirai was happy to have some work. That's how it went. But in the end, it didn't work anymore.

BD: Let's go back to Richard Dorson. You mentioned that Eder went to Indiana University in 1966. Dorson had these Asian students, and he wanted to have a place for them to publish their work. He arranged this deal to pay for the journal for the next ten years, and part of the deal was also regarding the name of the journal?

Knecht: Yes. Let's say that Eder's contribution to the deal was that he accepted the change of title. Actually it wasn't so outlandish, because Dorson's idea was to make the journal more visible as a journal that deals in Asian matters, and Eder was not against this. In a way it was his idea too. But having a European background, from the way he studied, he thought it was natural that he would go wider, not just be limited to a certain area. He said, "Asia is as big as Europe or bigger, so it doesn't matter so much, and if it serves the students' purpose and if it's a possibility to sell it to more people, then why not?"

BD: Once the deal with Indiana University dried up, he moved to Nanzan University in 1973, correct?

Knecht: Yes, definitely.

BD: You were living with him in a house in Tokyo before that time?

Knecht: Yes, since 1966. That means, when I came to Japan, he was in Indiana. He came back probably early 1967, I don't remember exactly. But he was living in the same house, and we met every day at the table. That's how I got to know about this journal. To some extent I had known about it before, just vaguely. But the house is where I came into contact with him. I would sometimes help him write a book review or something, because he also said, "I want you to be the editor eventually, but I'm not going to ask you to do the work before you finish your studies." That was a big problem when he died, because I had read manuscripts or made corrections once in a while, but not done the ordinary work of the journal. I did not know how the journal worked.

BD: His death was quite sudden. You felt a sense of responsibility to continue what he had done?

Knecht: Yes, because that's what he hoped for. I was certainly not against it. I had studied anthropology by that time, and from the very beginning my focus was on Japan, especially rural Japan. That was my personal interest, and this comes naturally with folklore. When I began studying this, I said, "I would like to do this sort of research." My professor said, "There's nobody with us who could teach you that way." They would give you some guidance about what to do, where to go, and that kind of thing. They also made it possible for me to do fieldwork.

I was convinced by that time that I could not do parish work, it was not my thing. When I read about him thinking he had the same idea, I was relieved and said, "Oh, that's a possibility." I never regretted that.

BD: He viewed the journal as a part of his missionary efforts. Did you view the journal in the same way yourself?

Knecht: Yes. Because my personal justification for it was this: to do this sort of work means you have to get involved with people. That's where I think I saw it differently from Eder. Eder always viewed things from a distance. He would go out into the villages with his motorbike, watch people working, watch *matsuri* (festivals), and that kind of thing, but he would never live in a Japanese house. He would always bring along his tent. To me, this was a symbol. He wanted to be close to the people, but he would keep a certain distance. I suppose it has to do with the idea of objective research that he had in mind. When you read his editorial, it sounds a little bit like that. He would not mingle with the people. He would not become a member of a family, not at all. He had some very close friends, but he would not stay there, whereas I stayed in the host families.

I could not do as he did. I thought, "If I want to be able to make a contribution to the missionaries, I have to do this from a standpoint they cannot take." Because if you work in the church, in a way you are of course among the people, but a certain kind of people. It's not the everyday family.

BD: These are people who have chosen to come to a church?

Knecht: Yes. You build your own world with kindergarten or whatever it is, in this strongly religious environment. I wanted to know what the people's religious feelings were, if there was anything like that at the base of their life. What is religion for them in their daily life? That's what I was interested in. I'm still interested in that, but this is entirely different from what missionaries do. That's why he felt uneasy when Indiana got so heavily involved in the journal, because he felt that took it too far away from the missionary effort and had no consideration for it anymore.

BD: It's a secular university.

Knecht: Yes. Of course, he could decide whose article he would accept or not. That was basically still his decision. Sometimes Dorson would say, "Listen, we would like to have this published." He said there was no pressure from Dorson. The only thing was the general agreement that he would consider their contributions first, let's put it that way.

BD: Would you say he felt a bit uneasy with the money?

Knecht: Yes, because—

BD: —he's controlled, to a certain extent.

Knecht: You have to follow the rules of those who give you the food.

BD: He did receive some support from fellow SVD members, including Robert Riemer, former president of Nanzan University. What was Riemer's relationship to the journal?

Knecht: Riemer supported him quite well. He was interested in the topic. He was a sociologist. When Eder was abroad in Indiana, or when he spent a year in Taiwan, or several months in the Philippines, Riemer took care of the journal. He would do the basic editorial work, that kind of thing. When Riemer became president, he was very much interested in making sure that the journal went well. That was during my time as editor. We had no problem anymore with finances. I didn't have to worry about finances.

Notes

1. Wilhelm, Schmidt. SVD (February 16, 1868–February 10, 1954) was a German priest in the missionary Society of the Divine Word, linguist, and ethnologist.

Related Texts

Matthias, Eder. 1942. Editorial. *Folklore Studies* vol.1 viii-ix.

Peter, Knecht. 1980. Obituary: Dr. Matthias Eder (1902-1980). *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 39 (2): 269–321.

The Beginnings of the Journal: Experiences as the Journal Editor

Peter Knecht



Peter Knecht was the editor of Asian Folklore Studies from 1980 until 2007.

Ben Dorman: How did you learn about the journal? What are your recollections of your first association with the journal?

Peter Knecht: In truth I don't really recall. The first time I got to know about it was through general information about Fu Jen University in Beijing, although by that stage all foreigners had left China. My association really began when I came to Japan and lived in the same house as the editor, Matthias Eder. He was interested in what I was planning to study. He never said, "You have to do this or that." No, he said, "You do your own work. I let you go, and I hope that one day you will be my successor." That was the only thing. I had in the back of my mind this idea of eventually being his assistant. That's how I started with contributions for the journal. I wrote book reviews in the beginning.

He thought it would be good for me to have an idea how publications work, what you have to do, how to write text, how to go over it again and correct it, and at that time go over the galley proofs. We used to get about two galley proofs before the final text came out. I always thought, "I want to see the day when I can produce an issue without any mistake in it." Later on, I worked with a printer at Kenkyūsha, and he could immediately see something I could not. I just could not see it. The eyes of the professional are something different. I was really quite grateful for his work. Eder used to work with a man named



Shirai, who had his own press. He did good work, but he didn't know foreign languages—which is actually sometimes better.

BD: In what ways was it better, given that the journal mainly published in English by that stage?

Knecht: Non-native speakers pay more attention to the words. That was my experience as well, as my native language is not English. You pay much more attention to single words than you would if you are a native speaker. Native speakers can immediately capture the whole sentence, but that's not the point. It's a big difference.

When I first worked on book reviews, I would propose a review, or Eder would have some book that he wanted reviewed. He had a section where he just made short, one-paragraph descriptions of books or articles, just to let people know what it was about. The point for him was, the journal is in English, but we want to introduce non-English publications to English speakers. There was a little bit about German also, but that was negligible. At first his idea was to do this for Chinese publications. The oldest issues have a number of summaries for Chinese articles, books, and all kinds of notes. Later on, it was done for Japanese publications, because there was no possibility for getting anything about China during those times in the mid-1960s.

BD: Is that in line with the vision when the journal changed from *Folklore Studies* to *Asian Folklore Studies*? Do you see that as being connected with Richard Dorson?

Knecht: Dorson and Eder's ideas were quite different. Dorson wanted to have a publication where he could place work by his students. But Eder had no students he could rely on to produce articles for the journal. He was originally interested in publishing material that was not available to those who could not read Chinese or Japanese. He could accept Dorson's idea, although the content of the idea was not exactly the same. Eder was teaching in high schools in Tokyo area that were related to the American Army, and that's where he got the money to produce the journal, from his teaching salary. He began to travel to Nanzan regularly once a week to give a class, but he wasn't a fulltime professor. Then in 1973, the house in which me, Eder, and other students were living was sold. That was when he moved to Nagoya, whereas I stayed in Tokyo to complete my studies.

BD: When Eder passed away, what was your connection to the journal?

Knecht: I had no official connection. The only thing I knew about the journal was what Eder had told me, and he wasn't a talkative man. Sometimes he might say, "Look, I have had these issues or faced that difficulty." Sometimes he mentioned a group of scholarly supporters he met through his time at Indiana University in the 1960s. It was an Asian folklore studies group, something like that, and for a long time he published a list of these people. I did as well, for a time. But eventually I cut it, because I felt we could use the space for other things, not just publishing a list of people's names.

At other times, he would say, "I don't have enough articles for the next issue." He never solicited articles but preferred to wait until people noticed the journal and perhaps submitted something. That was the basic idea I wanted to maintain. But the journal was not affiliated with any specific academic association. If there had been a connection like that, or if the group of Asian folklore studies scholars had been more active in terms of publishing in the journal, that would have been a different thing. But they didn't do anything. They just had their name in the journal in every issue for no reason.

When he died, I thought, "Oh, I've got some idea how producing this journal works." He had told me how he would read the articles, make the corrections, you know all this, how to deal with the printer, that kind of thing. He also told me that he had everything under control, but actually he did not. I had practically no idea what was going on. It took me perhaps two or so years to get to more normal dealings with authors as well as customers. After that, there was no major difficulty.

He had a list of subscribers. I don't remember how many there were, maybe one hundred or so. It wasn't a big number. I thought, "Well, at least we have some money coming in." Or rather, it was *supposed* to come in. Sometimes it didn't. When I looked through his files, there were copies of invoices to

subscribers, final notices for payment that had not been fulfilled. That was hard, because I had no idea who these people were. He started in 1942 and died in 1980, so he had managed the journal for almost forty years. For him, everything was evident. For me, no. I had no idea, not even the basics, of what you really have to do in order to run the journal. For example, I had no idea that there was a price for ordinary subscriptions and a reduced price for book dealers, agents, and bookstores. But I eventually learnt this through writing to everyone and getting their responses.

BD: Speaking of writing letters, I remember when I worked as the associate editor for the journal, from 2003 to 2006, that you wrote Christmas cards to everyone who contributed that year. Was that something that you picked up from Eder?

Knecht: No, that was my idea.

BD: I remember being very impressed with that.

Knecht: The journal was not something like *American Anthropologist*, a huge journal where it would be difficult for contributors and editors to have any personal relationships. For us, it wasn't like that. I developed relationships with people, because I would make detailed comments about submissions. It took me a long time to prepare a response to an article. Then people would respond, and you would get into a kind of conversation with them. Things were much slower too, because we did not have computers in those days, so receiving responses sometimes took weeks.

BD: Sometimes you never got an answer.

Knecht: That too. Then you somehow get close to people. We were happy enough to have these contributors, because that's the reason the journal could keep going. Sending a Christmas card is not everything, but I thought at least the university could spend this money to show appreciation for the work of these people who helped us to produce the journal and spread the university's name internationally.

I remember once the then president of the university came back from abroad, perhaps Australia, and he told me he met academics at some function. He mentioned he represented Nanzan University and they had never heard of it. But when he said that the university published *Asian Folklore Studies*, they knew it. That gave me quite a surprise. To me it showed that there were people who had an interest in the topic, and they knew about and appreciated the journal.

Also, I somehow reinterpreted Eder's idea of promoting Asian studies. Something that turned into a decisive factor for us was hiring a copyeditor, Michael Kelsey, who had done a partial translation of the *Konjaku Monogatari*. He had come as a Fulbright scholar to a department in Nanzan, and I had no idea who he was. But I happened to know the person who was responsible for him. One day he appeared in my office and said, "Are you the editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "I've known about this journal for quite a while, and I was wondering if I could be of some help." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He had been in Vietnam in the war, as a reporter or editor of a daily newspaper, so he was quite familiar with the publishing business.

Once his stay as a Fulbright scholar finished, he stayed on in Nagoya working as the copyeditor for some time. The university decided to hire him as the first copyeditor of both *Asian Folklore Studies* and the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, produced at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. The editor of that journal, whose English was much better than mine but who was also not a native speaker, said that he would be happy if Kelsey could help him as well. Kelsey stayed for several years, and through him we acquired the first computer, a RadioShack one, to help us with the editing work. From there we managed to employ two other people, one to do the typing and the other to help with administration.

BD: Were there times when someone contacted you and said, "The fact that you worked with me to get my publication complete really helped me in my career?"

Knecht: Yes. That happened several times. To me, that was proof that the way I was working with the journal was correct. My idea, and I thought it was Eder's idea too, was that the journal should be a place

where scholars in Asia can publish their work in a language that is understood outside of their world.

For me, the problem started on the very first day I began this work. There was an article written in English by a Japanese professor whose name I knew quite well. I must say the article—well, the English at least—was horrible. The content was interesting, and the topic was interesting. I thought, “What do I do with this man?” I had just graduated from university, I had nothing to my name, and yet I had to face this famous professor, Matsumae Takeshi, and tell him what needed to be done to make his work publishable. At that time, I had practically no other contributions. It was really the lowest moment of the journal’s life under me. In the end, I wrote to him with my suggestions. I was most surprised when he responded very positively. He wrote that he agreed with all the changes I suggested. He became a good friend of mine.

Matsumae was a major scholar in Japanese mythology. He was an outsider, because he had ideas others didn’t have or were not supposed to have. He wasn’t afraid of that. We were friends for many years up to when he died. This showed me that by reworking an article, you may be able to help the person. Well, of course, in his case, he didn’t need promotion [because he was already an established professor], but we had others that were promoted because of a publication in an English-language journal. The university’s decision to hire a full-time copyeditor for the English-language journals was one of the best decisions they made.

BD: What stands out in your mind as your proudest achievement while you were editing the journal?

Knecht: It was that we managed to get contributions from people whose work I was familiar with through my own studies, but who I would never have dared contact if I wasn’t involved with the journal. One of them was Wolfram Eberhard in the United States. In my mind, I thought, “He must be a very tough man.” He was not. He was so kind. Another was Professor Walther Heissig. He had known Eder from Beijing, but he didn’t know me. Then he submitted an article, which we published, but we made a horrible mistake in the title. When I got the journal, I noticed it, and then I wrote him and apologized profusely. But he wrote back saying not to worry about it. I met him in Hamburg later at the first international meeting I attended, and he was so kind. People like him and Eberhard were prepared to help out in various ways. Another one would probably be Matsumae, whom I mentioned earlier.

BD: What is your specific contribution to the journal?

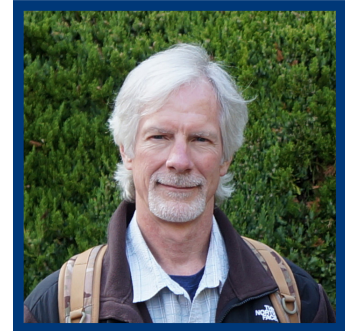
Knecht: It’s the idea of special issues based on a theme. This happened by chance, because at one stage we had several articles that somehow followed the same theme. I thought it would be good if we could try to do this once every year. As I recall, most of the special issues just came about through contributors contacting me. However, we did a special issue on animals and I had certain things in mind, so I contacted people asking if they could contribute. Other than that, I had no particular ideas about what the journal should be. It depended so much on the contributions we got. Also I thought it was important to publish an article or two from well-established scholars alongside people who were not yet established.

The advantage of *Asian Folklore Studies* was the leeway you had. You could be rather open in certain ways, and at the same time you could also be strict. If a famous person submitted an article, I would apply other standards than if it was somebody who just wrote their first piece. Many of these famous journals can’t do this. They have to stick to the line and just say, “You have to follow this and this and this, otherwise forget it, you can’t submit an article.” Which is understandable, but for us it wasn’t like that. It was interesting, because I thought *Asian Folklore Studies* is itself part of academic folklore. It should be a solid piece, not just—what do they call it now? Fake news.

The important thing for me was the author’s argument. They should be able to prove their point based on the evidence they had gathered. But the problem for me was whether the audience would be interested or not. I couldn’t stand in for the four hundred thousand or so folklorists in the world and say, “This is what we need.” You have an idea of what the field is, what it allows, what it does not allow. That sort of thing made editing the journal interesting for me.

Festivals, Rituals, and Bear Hunting in Japan

Scott Schnell



Scott Schnell is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Iowa and the former co-editor of Asian Ethnology. In addition to an interest in festivals and ritual, he has worked on dissident writer and ethnographer Ema Shū, and on matagi (bear hunters).

Ben Dorman: What attracted you to the study of Japan in the first place?

Scott Schnell: I usually give two answers to this question, and I choose one or the other depending on the audience. One answer is that I was very interested in ecology and environmental studies. I started reading Asian philosophy, and I thought there was a parallel there. I thought, "Oh, people in Japan must be really cool about the environment, so I need to go there and pick up on that." Of course, that's a very naïve point of view, and I found out when I first got here that I was somewhat misinformed.

But that piqued my interest, along with the fact that I was training in karate. I'm very interested in karate, so those two reasons really brought me to Japan. Then I decided to study Japanese, so that I could be more effective in interacting in Japan. That really put the hook in me, the language study. I kept going with that and just got pulled deeper and deeper into Japan and Japanese culture, history, and so forth, and that was the beginning.

BD: Environmental issues play a fairly important part in your research?

Schnell: Yes. When I was an undergraduate, my major was environmental studies. When I look back at that time and I look at myself now, my interests really haven't changed that much. Even though back



then I had no inkling that I was going to come to Japan and spend so much time doing fieldwork here. I'm interested in the environment and people's conceptualization of the environment, and how that plays out through belief and ritual, or what we would call religion.

BD: You've written that your interests have consistently led you away from coastal plains and into the forested mountain interior. Is this still the case, and why do you think it happened this way?

Schnell: It's still the case, because I'm naturally drawn to the mountains. I grew up in an area that didn't have mountains, and so I feel myself as being mountain-deprived, having mountain-deficit syndrome. I'm naturally inclined toward the mountains, but also because mountainous areas have been less well researched by anthropologists.

I recognized that there was a different lifestyle going on there, and that too had to be represented. There was a lot of emphasis on rice production in ecological studies. You get to a certain elevation and a certain ruggedness of terrain, and you can't really grow rice very successfully, so what were people doing there to survive? My work has tried to give a voice to people who really haven't been very well represented, mountain-dwelling people among them.

BD: You conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Furukawa, which is in Gifu prefecture in central Japan, and then you published *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community*. What's the significance of the word "rousing" in the title?

Schnell: We were just up there a couple of weeks ago. April 19 is the night of the *okoshi-daiko*, or as I translated it, the "rousing drum." It's an interesting history. It evolved over time from this little preliminary drum ritual. This is like the drum they call *furi-daiko* that goes around town before a sumo tournament starts, just to alert people that the tournament is about to begin. It was also called *mezamashi-daiko*, and *mezamashi* is a wake-up call. But the name changed to *okoshi-daiko*, and that's significant, because *okoshi* can mean to rouse you from sleep, but it also means to rouse people to rebel. That's where the title became very significant to me and why I chose to translate it "rousing drum," because "rousing" has the same double meaning.

BD: You explore anthropology and history and work the two together in your research. When did the change of name occur?

Schnell: I just had to go where my informants were leading me. We call them "informants" in anthropology. "Advisors" might be a better word, or simply "friends." People who are willing to talk to you and teach you what's going on, and I was picking these things up from them. I had in my mind to do more of an ecological study at the time, because my interests lay in that direction. But what I found out through my fieldwork is this political dimension that really needed to be addressed.

At the time, people were writing about *matsuri*, Shinto shrine festivals, and very much the communal harmony-type model. But I was seeing this unruly, boisterous side, and I thought that was very interesting and needed to be represented as well. I began to look at the historical developments, figuring that this has probably changed over time. I'm more interested in ritual than *matsuri* or Japanese festivals per se. It's the ritual aspects that I found interesting, and my thinking was that ritual isn't just stereotyped repetitive behavior. It changes over time, and it adapts or is adapted to current situations, current conditions, and changing needs.

I was interested in how the historical development happened, especially when I discovered that this rather violent drum procession began as just a little drum going around town announcing the start of the festival. How did it evolve into this whole different thing and really become the core, the heart and soul of the festival? I had to delve into the historical material. I'm not trained as a historian, although I find the historical dimension is absolutely vital, because otherwise you get the misconception that ritual is static. It's just repetitive behavior. It's a force of conservatism, if you will. But I was looking at it more as a dynamic thing, so how does it change over time?

BD: You didn't just delve into the records. You actually delved into the festival itself. There's a photo of you actively participating.

Schnell: There's a photo that appeared in this women's magazine called *Fujin Gahō*, and I didn't know it until about a year later when my friends passed me a copy of the issue. I participated twice in a row. You have to take out insurance to participate in the festival, because people do get injured. It's a so-called *kanda matsuri* or fighting festival. That may be overdoing it. In contemporary times the violence is pretty controlled, so there are injuries, but not quite the same level as prior to World War II, for example.

BD: In 2006 you published an article in *Asian Folklore Studies* that explored the use of literature as a source of historical and ethnographic data and focused on the writer Ema Shū and his massive historical novel, *Yama no Tami* or *The Mountain Folk*. Could you tell us more about Ema Shū and his work?

Schnell: He's a very interesting figure. He's not very well known, because he was stubborn and also rather obsessed with this one project. But for a time he was a very popular author. He was disillusioned because of the aftermath of the great Tokyo earthquake in 1923 and the police oppression of Korean nationals living in Tokyo at the time. This is leading up into the war experience, and so he's seeing the militancy develop, and he's really taking a strong stance against it, becoming a dissident. He had actually been born and was raised in Hida Takayama where the novel is placed. This book *Yama no Tami* is about a peasant rebellion that occurred in 1869. It's the Umemura rebellion, where they rose up against this young governor newly appointed by the Meiji government and actually ended up killing him. Well, they didn't kill him, they wounded him. He was put in prison and later died there.

Ema Shū is Ema Nakashi's pen name. The author was using this novel as an indirect way of criticizing his own government at the time. He was being surveilled and oppressed by the special police in Tokyo. He decided to go underground. He moved back to Takayama and redefined himself as a folklorist, or we would call him an ethnographer. Interestingly, he edited a journal called *Yama-bito*, and it ran for several years and was pretty highly regarded. A lot of prominent folklorists, Yanagita Kunio among them, contributed to that journal.

He was out in the mountains gathering historical and ethnographic data, especially focusing on this peasant rebellion, and incorporating that directly into his novel and some of the articles he wrote under other pen names for the journal. He used about five or six different pen names, depending on the subject matter. He's a very interesting character, a very interesting person. Again, he's not widely known, although literary critics do think pretty highly of his work.

He rewrote that same novel four different times, each striving for more complete coverage but also incorporating some of the new information he uncovered by doing fieldwork. Then especially after World War II, he could be more open and direct. In the novel he makes a connection between what's going on during the Meiji restoration, including the oppression of Buddhism, and 1930s Japan leading into the war experience. He hints that that whole militarism began back during the early years of the Meiji period, in a sense colonizing the Japanese countryside, just like the government would later colonize Manchuria, Taiwan, and Korea. It's the work of a dissident. It's a critique of militarism in disguised form—another place and another time—because it's the only way he could write about it and get away with it. He's really trained as a novelist, but he retooled himself as a folklorist ethnographer and historian. He did a pretty good job of it.

BD: Have you finished with that research, or are you continuing?

Schnell: My problem in doing fieldwork is that I stumble upon really interesting topics, and then I get misdirected. I was in the midst of this project with this novel by Ema Shū as a source of historical and ethnographic data. Through that, I discovered mountain-oriented religious belief and practice but also that the mountaineers and religious aesthetics relied upon local hunters as guides. These local hunters as guides start popping up in different places—the same people but different places. They're moving around. But we were taught back in school that people in villages are isolated, they stay put, and they're rooted in place, because they're growing rice, and they're rooted in place like the rice pens themselves.

You go from one valley to the next, and there's no contact between them. All that is wrong. There were interconnections through the activities of hunters, timber cutters, and other people who live and work in the mountains. Mountains aren't barriers to communication, they're conduits. It really turned my head around.

That's what I mean when I say the people who lived and worked in the mountains weren't really well represented. They become intermediaries of a sort. Intermediaries between places and between earth and heaven. It's very interesting, because the rice farmers down in the lowlands would rely upon these hunters to offer prayers for them. Because where do you do that? It's at the summits of the mountains, like prayers for rain. The hunters became almost like shamans or some kind of religious practitioner. They would offer ritual prayers for rain on behalf of the farmers below, even though they themselves weren't directly benefiting. They seem to have a more intimate relationship with this *yama no kami*—which is the mountain god, mountain deity, or mountain spirit—such that they weren't living in fear.

Also, they would identify her as female, which I thought was interesting. In the lowlands, if you're growing rice, the *yama no kami* is something that comes down in the spring and becomes the *ta no kami*, the god or spirit of the rice paddies for the duration of the growing season. It then goes back up into the mountains but is identified as a male. The mountain people recognize there's a *yama no kami* mountain spirit or god there, but it doesn't go anywhere. Why would it? It belongs in the mountains. What's more, it's identified as female. They have more of an intimate association and what I would call a trusting relationship with it. Whereas the lowlands image of the *yama no kami* is living in fear of its wrath, that it can bring destruction just as easily as rain and other resources that they need to survive. I found that to be really interesting.

Gradually I was drawn into the topic of the *matagi*, who are usually described in English as traditional hunters. It's a word that used to be used exclusively in the Tōhoku region, specifically Akita and Aomori, but has now become more of a general term for a traditional hunter. I'm not interested in the *matagi* because they kill animals. It's because they have this special intimacy with the environment that is represented through their belief in the *yama no kami*.

I found that they distinguish themselves from your typical hunter. In fact, when they're talking about a sports hunter, they use the English word "hunter," but they never use that term in reference to themselves. Then the question becomes, "Well, what is the difference?" How do you distinguish *matagi* from "hunter"? That's where you get into this sense that you're talking about people who are highly knowledgeable and have this intimate association with their local area, and that is expressed through their veneration of the *yama no kami* mountain deity or spirit.

Whereas recreational hunters are really just looking for an adventure or trophy. To the *matagi*, it's very important first of all to acknowledge that you're privileged to be in the mountains, that you are being bestowed with these gifts, and that you should not abuse the privilege by taking more than you need. Also, you kill whatever you eat. If you're not going to eat it, then you have no business killing it. Whereas a sports hunter might just be out for the thrill of the pursuit and maybe a trophy or something like that.

I realize there's not a clear-cut absolute distinction between the two categories, but in general terms, that's how I would distinguish them. The *matagi* recognize and revere the mountain spirit or god. That to me percolates through their entire existence and in a way acts as a rudimentary conservation ethic. If they abuse the privilege by taking too much, then they run the risk of incurring her wrath, which means less success in the future. Traditionally they depended upon the mountains for their sustenance. They were careful not to abuse the privilege, not to betray that trust.

BD: Can you tell me a little bit about their lives? Are they people who go up in the mountains on the weekends and so on? I'd like to learn a little bit more about that.

Schnell: Things change over time, and people often ask me, "Do *matagi* still exist?" It's a little bit similar to like in North America, if someone were to ask, are there still real cowboys out there? Well, yes and no. I guess there are people you could call cowboys, but they're driving pickup trucks, and they're living in houses with TV and all the modern conveniences and so forth. That's the way it is with the *matagi*.

They've all got other jobs. In fact, it's true that they still believe in the ethic of eating what you kill, otherwise you have no business killing it, but they don't need to in order to survive. Then the question is, why do they persist? That's one of the leading questions in my research, why is it important to continue to kill animals when you don't absolutely need that for your own subsistence?

Bears in particular, because they're defined now first and foremost as bear hunters, with this relationship with the bear. A lot of animal rights people are upset about this and really object to killing bears, especially when bears are seen as being somewhat threatened. There's this idea that their numbers are declining. Whether that's true or not still seems to be a bit of an open question. I want to clearly distinguish the *matagi* again from your typical hunter, because again, without the bear their identity would be gone. They really depend upon the bears and the health of the bear population. But they also see that without their presence and activity, animal populations can become too numerous and start threatening other species and vegetation. What I found through my research is that you can take a stance that we want to protect wildlife and we want to conserve it, but what do you do when one species becomes so numerous that it starts to threaten the existence of another species? Then it gets more complicated.

What the *matagi* say is, "We're here to help maintain a balance, we don't want to take more than we should, but we want to keep up our tradition." You know in Japan there are problems with deer, wild boar, monkeys, and bear also to some extent wandering down into towns and cities, encountering human beings, freaking out, and sometimes people get mauled. The answer to that from the perspective of the *matagi* is, "We need to instill and maintain a fear of human beings in the bear, and that will resolve these problems. They'll stay where they belong, and everything will be fine." How do you instill and maintain the fear of human beings in the bear? Keep up the hunting pressure.

What I found out and came to understand about them, and what I'm really envious about them for, is that they still recognize their place in the ecosystem. Whereas we have forgotten that, or divorced ourselves, or disguise our participation in it so well that all our food comes in packages from grocery stores. We don't really have a sense anymore, especially if we're eating meat, that a living thing basically gave itself so that we could survive. They can't escape that recognition. They have to live with it, and I find that admirable.

To get back to your question though, even though I've been rambling in a rather long-winded manner, are they the *matagi* of old, like subsistence hunters? No, hunting is more or less a weekend activity, and only during certain times of the year. If you're talking about bears, then you're talking about maybe two or three weekends per year, where the time is just right to engage in that activity. But that short period of time is probably the most important time in their entire year in terms of their own self-identity and consciousness. Their veneration of the *yama no kami* is still very prominent among them. They're all living in nice houses, have flat-screen TVs, talk on cell phones, and have all the modern conveniences. It's not a subsistence-oriented lifestyle anymore.

BD: When you say "they," is it a set group of people? Or can people become *matagi* and join their groups?

Schnell: That's a good question, and it becomes an increasingly interesting question. Traditionally no, you would have had to grow up in a village where there are *matagi* present, and probably into a *matagi* household, and even then it wasn't going to be assured that you yourself would become a *matagi*. But these days, since their numbers are dwindling, they're very concerned that their tradition is in real danger of fading out entirely. When you're in that situation you become less adamant about outsiders coming in, and so they're opening up. Maybe you don't have to have been born in this area.

Traditionally *matagi* were exclusively men, and that's starting to change too. I saw this in Furukawa as well. All of a sudden women are participating in Mikoshi processions of the portable shrine, and they're helping to carry the Mikoshi. That used to be taboo for women, but now you see women are starting to participate. That's not necessarily a reflection of a more enlightened attitude. It might be simple necessity, in that we don't have the manpower anymore to carry this heavy object, we can't be as choosy as we once were. You see that to some extent among the *matagi* as well.

I was just up in one of these traditionally *matagi* villages, and it's now down to about twenty households. It's very difficult to continue to live there, in the sense that the eldest son in my host household had to commute two hours to go to high school one way, because there was no local high school anymore. That's one way. That's a pretty major sacrifice to make to continue to stay in this village. The fact is people would like to stay, but they're being forced by circumstance to move elsewhere, and the villages themselves are dying out.

The other day I met this young man who had just graduated from a university in Tokyo and decided to move and take up residence there. I was there watching him being taught how to skin and butcher a bear, and he was in there hands-on, trying to do everything that they were doing. It's going to be interesting. Will he persist? Will he get burned out after few months? I don't know, but it's interesting that the attempt is being made, and also that he's being welcomed. It's not going to be easy for him, but again times have changed, and people can no longer afford to be so choosy about who they let in to pass on their tradition.

BD: Now that you're studying the *matagi*, have your ideas changed about the relationship between the Japanese people and nature, or your ideas of the environment?

Schnell: I started out by saying I was disillusioned when I first came to Japan and found that they were almost as bad as Americans at spoiling their environment. It was a bit of a shock for me. After working with the *matagi*, that initial admiration has been re-instilled, because the *matagi* are a people who have great respect for nature and feel themselves a part of it and not divorced from it at all. In a roundabout way I ended up back where I started. I shouldn't say this, because it blows through this guise of objectivity that we sometimes try to maintain, but I found the *matagi* to be models for us to emulate in some ways. There's a difference between the ideal and the actual behavior. Human beings usually don't measure up to the ideals, but the ideals are still important to guide our behavior. That's what the *matagi* represent to me.

In Japan you hear the phrase *shizen to kyōsei suru* or *shizen to kyōzon suru*, to coexist with nature. But what does that mean? It's very interesting. There's a religious studies professor at Kyoto University named Yamaori Tetsuo. His idea is we shouldn't talk about *kyōsei suru*, to coexist with nature. His term is *kyōsei kyōshi*, or "coexist and co-die." If you still recognize that you are tied up in this network of relationship we call an ecosystem, then you recognize that you're not just feeding on other creatures but one day they will be feeding on you. You could even see plants in a way as consuming animals after the animal body has perished and returned to the soil. Even people who get cremated are being consumed in a way by the fire, but also their nutrients are being recycled.

The *matagi* are people who still recognize that they're definitely part of the local ecosystem and that they have a very important role in maintaining it, so in that sense my confidence has been restored to some extent. That has changed. Also, I was really anti-hunting for most of my life, and I was brought up with this environmentalist attitude. I would still consider myself an environmentalist by the way. But if we're talking about protecting pristine wilderness, that's an admirable goal, but the fact is very little of it still exists. Certainly, where we find it, we should protect it. But if over 99 percent of the earth is no longer pristine, then what are we going to do about that?

This is where I see this other model. A model of playing a role and human beings interacting with the environment but doing a good job of it. Those are the kinds of models that we need. Even examples that prove the opposite, both negative and positive examples. We can learn in either case from them. The research has helped me to understand how naïve I was in my thinking about nature. I'm interested in this question: if we don't really have to kill and consume animals, then why should we persist? I'm starting to come around to the notion that this is a gift that is offered to us by nature, and unless we accept it then we're not maintaining that relationship or that contract between us.

I hope that I'm not being blasphemous by drawing this connection, but I'll just throw it out there. When I think of the *matagi* and their attitude toward animals, a phrase comes into my head: "Here is my body, given for you." That is their attitude when they consume a bear or some other animal that they have

killed. When you're consuming an animal, you're happy to have the food, and you're probably enjoying it, but you're also remembering that a living creature gave itself for you, so there's a sense of indebtedness. Without that, what puts limits on our consumption? If we have that sense of indebtedness, then probably we're going to draw the line: "We've had enough. We don't need any more than this." That's where I think it becomes a rudimentary conservation ethic.

BD: Do you feel that your conservation ethic is one of the most important aspects to emerge from your research?

Scott: Certainly, one of them. There are a lot of interesting ideas that are coming out of it, but that would be one. Maybe the most important one. I'm very interested in animism, and within anthropology animism is all too often dismissed as a primitive superstitious belief system. Maybe not so much by anthropologists but by the general public. But I have come to see animism as a truly enlightened perspective. Animism being the idea that there's this conscious presence in nature, and nature is looking back at us, and nature expects us to behave in certain ways.

It's no longer a matter of us being responsible *for* nature and feeling like we have to protect it and so forth, but rather being responsible *to* nature. In other words, we have to play our part. We have to make sure that we're not abusing the privilege. Unless you have this sense of nature as a conscious presence, then that responsibility to nature becomes weak or nonexistent. I see the concept of the *yama no kami*, the mountain spirit or mountain god, as a form of animism and therefore a rather enlightened point of view.

BD: Is there some sort of opposition to what the *matagi* are doing from a bureaucratic or governmental side?

Schnell: Historically, yes. People who move from place to place are always going to be considered somewhat suspicious by the central government, because you can't keep track of them. Especially if they're not engaged in rice production, then how are you going to tax them? How are you going to extract their wealth? They're better able to disguise what they're doing, so there's been that. There's been a religious, I wouldn't say "prejudice," but uncertainty about the *matagi*, because again they kill and consume living creatures, which is a problem for Buddhism and even for Shinto in a sense. It's interesting how the *matagi* historically have found ways around that. That's a whole different story.

But these days, no, they're certainly not suppressed by the government. The Japanese government is not a monolith. It's full of these various ministries, and they all have their own agenda, but the Ministry of Environment is actively promoting or recruiting hunters. They sponsor these little workshops in different parts of the country, where you can go and shoot a gun and that type of thing. It's a response to recognizing this need that certain species of animals are becoming too populous now. Again, it's not a simple matter of, "Oh, we're into protecting wildlife, and we should do that." But what if the wildlife are becoming so numerous that they're threatening these treasured natural stands of vegetation like you find in natural parks? There are just too many deer, too many wild boar, and so on. They're trying to actively recruit hunters to help them, and they're building up this idea of—they borrow the French word "*gibier*," wild game meat. I was in Tokyo a few weeks ago and went to this restaurant called Ro to Matagi. I guess the "*ro*" is the hot plate that you fry the meat on, but they're using the word "*matagi*" as the title of their restaurant. It's a really popular restaurant.

The government would be delighted to have more *matagi* these days. They're not the only ones that can effectively control animal populations, because we're talking about their very own backyards. I've been with them bear hunting, and usually when they go out to get a bear, they will get one, because they know what they're doing. But by the same token, they stop when they have enough. But other people will be wandering around. It's very easy to get lost if you don't know what you're doing. Most *matagi* are in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. Not very many young people are coming in to participate, so it's sadly fading away.

BD: Can you briefly describe your experience bear hunting?

Schnell: My role is just to tag along and watch, and the *matagi* are very kind in including me in their group. But the fact is I almost can't help but be a drag on them, because I'm scrambling along to keep up. These are steep slopes, and it's hard to keep up, let's put it that way. I'm just thrilled to be out there with them. I try to keep quiet, and I try to be respectful, but my role is to observe. Maybe I can ask a question now and again, but basically I stay out of their way. When they go into the mountains, they are very serious. They're focused, and they're serious about it. Actual participation really helps me to understand what is involved.

Maybe I should use an example. I mentioned a connection between hunters and mountaineering. Most of the people in the local Mountain Rescue Corps are *matagi*, because they are used to finding their way around in the mountains. They're used to following tracks and signs and things to find the injured person, but they're also used to bringing things back out of the mountains, like a bear that they have shot. They know how to recover the body, and that means they're better at carrying a wounded person back to safety and help or to a rescue helicopter or whatever. They have special skills and knowledge that would be useful in other aspects as well. The government would be well placed to assist, promote, and protect them wherever it could.

BD: There could be a tourism element to it, as well as a real health, welfare, and safety element.

Schnell: There is most definitely a tourist element now, ecotourism. Some of the *matagi* are leading tours into the mountains, identifying and obtaining *sansai* or edible mountain plants. Or just appreciating: identifying certain trees and getting a sense of the ecology and how things fit together, and how everything is connected through a network. Increasingly, *matagi* are getting involved in these educational adventure tours, you could call them. That will be even more important in the future. A lot of them now manage *minshuku* or *ryokan*, places for people to come and stay. While they're there, if people can sample some of the food and learn something about the local environment, so much the better.

BD: What's the next step for this research on the *matagi*? Where would you like to take it, or where is it taking you?

Schnell: We never work in a vacuum in all these projects that we've been talking about. I've been helped immensely by Japanese scholars who were there working on these things before me. If you really want to know about the *matagi* and you're fortunate enough to be able to read Japanese, then there's a scholar and author named Taguchi Hiromi who's written all kinds of books and articles about the *matagi*. He's the expert. He's the authority. It's not just him, of course. There are a wide range of scholars that have written about the *matagi*.

My dilemma is, how do I make a role for myself? How do I create a niche for myself when lots of people have been writing about the *matagi*? What's left? What's left is, for example, if you look at Professor Taguchi, he has been writing about and actively involved with the *matagi* for twenty to thirty years. He's helped them to organize themselves, and he sponsors an annual event called "The Matagi Summit," where they get together and discuss the issues. He then becomes part of my ethnography, because without him the *matagi* might have faded away completely. That's where I come in, standing back and seeing how scholars and anthropologists are involved in helping or assisting the very communities that they're studying.

Also, how the work of anthropologists is being drawn into the popular media. I mentioned restaurants, but there are comic books, novels, and Nike shoes named "*matagi*." It's really become a more widespread image. In the future that becomes part of my role, to try to describe all that as well, and also make a comparison across cultures. People who are familiar with Native Americans or indigenous people in other parts of the world who hunt animals would be seeing similarities in this consciousness, this sense that nature is a conscious presence and expects us to behave in certain ways. This special sensitivity and appreciation for nature. You can find that all over the world, so there are comparisons to be made. I'm not

saying that they're all the same. I'm just saying there are similarities, and that becomes part of my role as well. How to bring this to a more general audience? Not just Japan specialists, but a general audience.

Related Texts

Schnell, Scott. 1999. *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

———. 2006. "Ema Shū's 'The Mountain Folk': Fictionalized Ethnography and Veiled Dissent." *Asian Folklore Studies* 65 (2): 269–321.



Secrecy, Buddhist Psychology, and Editing Academic Journals

Clark Chilson



Clark Chilson is an associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. His fields of study include religion in Japan, particularly Buddhism, and popular religion. Chilson was associate editor of Asian Folklore Studies, working under then editor, Peter Knecht.

Editor's Note: Before we began the interview proper, Clark Chilson mentioned that when he interviews people for fieldwork, he is aware of issues related to memory access. The first exchange relates to that point, and although we does not discuss this at the very beginning of the podcast interview, I feel it is appropriate to include it at the start.

Ben Dorman: As I'm asking you questions on whether you're accessing your memory of that time, could you mention something about caveats we were discussing earlier?

Clark Chilson: When I do ethnographic fieldwork and am interviewing somebody, I often have to remind myself that whatever they're telling me is what is occurring in their consciousness at the moment I'm asking the question or shortly thereafter. If I spoke with them the next day, they might tell me something different, and actually they often do. I could ask the same question to the same person on different days and get a slightly different answer, not because they're trying to be misleading in any way, but simply because what occurs to them at that moment is different. I wanted to put that caveat out there so I could speak freely and let people know that if you ask me these same questions on a different day, I may have a slightly different answer. Everything is honest to the extent that it occurs to me at the moment.



BD: Why did you come to Japan in the first place? What happened to you while you were here?

Chilson: I came to Japan to get away from Buffalo, New York, where I was going to school. I didn't have much interest in Japan. I probably could have found it on the map at the time, but the only Japanese word I knew the month before I came to Japan was "*arigato*." The only reason why I knew that word was it was the name of a local Japanese restaurant.

I was at the State University of New York (SUNY) Buffalo State College, and they had an exchange program with Kansai Gaidai. I went to an office with the intention of going to a different university in the United States, and there was a pamphlet about it on the table. When the administrator called me in, I said, "Can I apply to this program in Japan?" He asked me what my GPA was, and it was good. He said, "Sure." That was in March of 1986, and in August I flew to Japan.

BD: A pamphlet on the table.

Chilson: That's what brought me to Japan. Yes, a pamphlet on the table and a desire for adventure.

BD: And to get out of Buffalo?

Chilson: To get out of my life in upstate western New York.

BD: What happened to you once you got here?

Chilson: I went to Kansai Gaidai, and I joined a boxing club, because I thought it would be too cliché to join a martial arts club. That was really interesting for me, because I was the only foreigner in the club. They were not used to having foreigners. They embraced me as one of their own. In the 1980s, boxing was pretty big in Japan. I did not come to Japan to fall in love with it, but one thing that really interests me about Japan is that it is a very different place than the United States. I was always interested in the question of how we should live our lives. I found it really interesting coming to Japan and seeing how people live their lives in very different ways. That's what led me to want to study anthropology here in Japan. At that time, the Japanese economy was very good. I decided I just wanted to stay in Japan and eventually study anthropology. I worked, and I studied Japanese. I went to a *semmongakkō* or Japanese language school.

Then I thought about how my mother raised me as a single parent. She was very concerned that I'd be able to go out and make a living. I persuaded her that if I studied anthropology in Japan I would gain a marketable skill, Japanese language, so I could find a job when I was done. From my mother's perspective, who didn't go to college, she couldn't see how anthropology was going to help me get a job. Studying anthropology in Japan was an easier sell for both her and myself, too. I was concerned about making money and surviving after college as well. That brought me to Nanzan, because Nanzan was really one of the only places in Japan that had an undergraduate program in anthropology. After being in Japan a little more than two years, I took the entrance exam here.

BD: You got into the anthropology department. You had a long connection with Peter Knecht.

Chilson: Yes.

BD: Is that when your connection began with him?

Chilson: Yes. Peter was a professor in the anthropology department when I joined. I remember meeting him at an orientation. I took a class in my freshman or sophomore year with him. I took a course he taught on folklore in the program for exchange students. Then I took courses with him where he taught in Japanese. He taught a course on pilgrimage, which I took. At the time, in your junior year you had to decide which area of anthropology you were going to specialize in. I decided I wanted to specialize in the anthropological study of religion, and Peter was the expert on that. I took his seminars for two years.

Peter had an amazing amount of knowledge, and not only on the history of anthropology. In one seminar, he taught about the history of the discipline of anthropological study of religion. I was blown away by how meticulously he had studied knew texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He had not only read these texts, which people may have cited as being foundational to the discipline, but he had really studied them. That told me the importance of knowing the intellectual history of a discipline. When I later went into religious studies, I felt like one of the first things I needed to do was to study the intellectual history of religious studies. That was because of Peter's influence, because you don't know a discipline unless you know its history.

I graduated from Nanzan, and I decided to go into religious studies. I went to Lancaster. I eventually decided to do my doctoral dissertation on secretive Pure Land Buddhist groups, in large part because of what Peter had told me at one stage. I was doing research on a tenth-century Japanese holy man named Kūya. I went to a festival in Kyoto for Kūya, and I met some people there. They told me that they had a Kūya statue. Kūya statues are very unique, because they show images of little men coming out of Kūya's mouth. Art historians have documented these, and these people told me that they had one in an area where I had not seen it documented anywhere. I was very eager to go see it.

When I asked, they were not very receptive. I didn't know who they were at the time, but I talked to these people and I said I'd really like to see it. I told them more about who I was and what I was doing research on. They went off together at this temple in Kyoto and had a meeting, and they said, "Okay. You can come visit us." They actually lived about an hour away from Nagoya. They weren't from Kyoto. They gave me directions to the place, and I went there. When I got there, I was taken to the back room with a leader, and we talked about Kūya. Then, after about an hour, he said, "We have an interest in Kūya, but it's only on the surface. He's only a surface person. We're really more interested in Shin Buddhism." Then he said, "The real Shin Buddhism is the Shin Buddhism of Shinran that they don't teach at the temples."

After going there, having this experience, and being told about secret Shin Buddhist organizations, I thought that was very odd. I went to Peter, who said, "Well, there's a lot of those types of organizations in the north of the country. They're called *kakushi nenbutsu*." Then, I found a book on *kakushi nenbutsu*. I was reading what was in that book and comparing it to my field notes, and there was a lot of overlap. I thought, "This is amazing that these groups are still alive in central Japan." That's how I got to do my dissertation. That's why I decided to do my dissertation on them, because I could see how they were part of a much wider movement, which I never would have known about had Peter not pointed me in the direction of a book most people did not know about.

I was doing my dissertation on Kūya. I decided to change my dissertation topic to focus on these people instead. I knew Ian Reader when I was nineteen years old and had studied Japanese religion with him at Kansai Gaidai. He moved to Lancaster University, and I started doing my doctoral dissertation with him on Kūya. Then in 1996, I left the City of Lancaster and came to Japan. In 1998 I started working on the journals here.

BD: As the associate editor?

Chilson: Yes.

BD: How was that experience for you?

Chilson: It was interesting to work with Peter on *Asian Folklore Studies*, and then Paul Swanson of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, because I had known them as my teachers. Now I was working with them to produce something together. They taught me a different way of thinking about scholarship and the service of scholarship, including helping other people get their scholarship out there. Ed Skrzypczak also edited the journals and *Monumenta Nipponica*. He may have told me in Peter's presence that the job of a good copyeditor is to be invisible. You make the author better, but make sure that your footprint is nowhere on it. That always stuck with me. That was the ideal editor, to make someone's work better without putting one's own ideas or stylistic preferences in the work. I certainly always try to do that with the journals.

Peter was very meticulous about making sure the journals came out perfect. Every issue, we would stay up fairly late. I remember some nights leaving here at 1:30 or 2 am the day before Peter was going to take the journal to Tokyo to get it printed. There was no error too small to be corrected. If we started

at 5 pm, sometimes it took seven or eight hours before we were finished finding every little error you can imagine. The leading was just not perfect on a page, or there was some issue with italics. Things that most readers probably wouldn't notice.

But we noticed, and we would have to fix it, which would mean going back to the galleys, finding it in the galleys, changing it, reprinting it. But the point is that every issue has to be perfect. That was not an easy task, because as you know, Peter was very interested in making sure scholars who are not native English speakers have a voice in *Asian Folklore Studies*. He wanted it to be an international journal. He didn't want it to be dominated by the English-speaking world. He was very supportive of making sure that people who are doing research on folklore in Asia had an opportunity to share their work in English with the wider world.

That meant sometimes heavily rewriting articles, sending it back to the author, having the author change what we did, a lot of back and forth. The journal was much better for the work that Peter did to make sure that people who are working in places like Czechoslovakia, little towns in Nepal, or places in rural China, who had done work that other people were not doing, were able to make their work known. The journal really had a special role in bringing scholarship to light that would never have come to light, had it not been for the amount of work that he put into making sure it did.

BD: How do you think your experience with the journal affected your own approach to scholarship? It definitely affected my approach to scholarship in a number of ways.

Chilson: I could see that there's a huge gap between what one submits to a journal and what finally gets published. That was helpful for me as a graduate student, because it said, "Listen, it doesn't have to be perfect in the beginning. You can do your best, submit it, see what happens, and other people will help you make it better if they think it's worth doing." That was one way. The second way is how appreciative I was of the people who did take on my work and try to make it better, and typically they did make it better. The editor was not an impediment to my getting good scholarship out there. They were often my friend, even if it didn't always feel like that at the time. It was certainly very helpful in that way.

I also have a greater appreciation for the meticulous manner in which people do copyediting. People who have not done copyediting work or have not benefited from copyediting work often don't value what copyeditors do. But you can immediately tell books that are copyedited well compared to those that aren't. Peter also said something to me when I was an undergraduate that always stuck with me. He said, "If an author can't pay attention to the little things, how can we trust him or her on the big things?" If they can't pay enough attention to get it right on the small things, it's hard to believe them on the big things. Therefore, it's important for you to get it right on the small things.

BD: He told me the same thing.

Chilson: He felt the same way with the journal. We had to get it right on the small things. "Are all the italics correct? Are the diacritical marks consistent throughout?" He felt that that was really important, because if people started noticing an inconsistency, it would undermine what the author was trying to do. That would hurt the author and the journal. It was important for us to get it right with that little stuff. It was not little—it just seemed like little.

BD: Nothing is too small.

Chilson: After we did the journal, it would come back. We would get the printed copy of it, and Peter would bring it to my office. We'd set up an appointment to go out and celebrate. He would thank me by taking me to dinner. We would talk about the journal, its future, and what he was trying to do with the journal. I have fond memories of being at the institute until 2 am trying to make it perfect, the sense of satisfaction that we had done everything we could to make it perfect. Then the ritualization of getting the copy and going out and celebrating.

We did it twice a year, and it was a nice cycle to working on the journal in that way. You come in with very rough articles sometimes, and we got it to the state where we thought it was perfect. Then we'd go

out and celebrate. Peter would sometimes find mistakes later, but he was never upset about it. He always felt like we did the best we could in the time we had. Frankly, I never found any major mistakes. I never found anything that made me gasp. I found things that make me groan.

BD: Not at the level of a gasp?

Chilson: Not at the level of a gasp.

BD: I came on the scene in 2003. I took your job. You were here for a little while longer after that?

Chilson: Just a couple of months.

BD: Then you moved back to the United States?

Chilson: Yes. I moved to Ithaca, New York, and I finished my dissertation on these three secretive Buddhist organizations. One group was in Kagoshima, and, very much like the secretive Christians, they had gone underground to avoid government persecution. Then there were the groups in central and northern Japan who claimed to have the true teachings of Shinran, who was considered the founder of Shin Pure Land Buddhism. I compared secrecy in those three different groups for my dissertation.

BD: That was the work that became the basis of your book, *Secrecy's Power*?

Chilson: Yes. That became the basis of the book. In the dissertation I was really looking at how and why they were secretive. I was looking at different strategies they used for secrecy, and what social factors led to their secrecy. With the book, I tried to make an argument that I had not formulated in the dissertation. I had not seen it when I was done with the dissertation, but I did see it after further reflecting on what was going on in their secrecy. What I found, which I thought was important and still think is important, is that the consequences of secrecy are multiple and often contradictory. What a group is trying to do by hiding something and what actually happens as a result can actually be diametrically opposed.

For example, in the group in Kagoshima in southern Japan, but not just that group, we find that they have to come up with new strategies for hiding their religion. One of the strategies they came up with is to present their religion as a form of Shinto. They connected with a local Shinto shrine and local mountain worship. Over time, those elements became incorporated as part of the religion. The very strategy for trying to preserve the religion wound up not preserving it and actually wound up changing it. Secrecy was intended to preserve, but it actually led to transformation, so the preservation wasn't there.

Also you hide so people leave you alone, so that you're not persecuted. But if found out at all, the very fact of your secret will make people very interested. The idea of hiding in order to protect oneself can actually lead to greater persecution, because secrecy elicits a much stronger response by government organizations. They really want to know why you're being secretive. There's that dilemma. The contradictions that occur as a result of hiding something are really important. Most of the scholarship you read on secrecy, not just religious but government secrecy, says that religion has done X to protect power or to enhance the perceived value of something. Actually what's going on is much more multifaceted, and it often goes against the goals of the very people who think secrecy is getting them somewhere.

BD: Why did you use the title *Secrecy's Power*?

Chilson: The idea was that secrecy has the power to do different things. This secrecy was doing things that the people who were doing the hiding did not intend. The very act of secrecy had its own inertia that couldn't be completely controlled by the people who were concealing, by the people who were keeping secrets. Secrecy has consequences that go beyond the intentions of the secret keepers. *Secrecy's Power* is looking at the power of secrecy to do things that the people who create secrets can't completely control. Through its consequences, secrecy itself has power. That's why the title is *Secrecy's Power*. It's not people just using secrecy to enhance their own power, which happens, but actually secrecy doing things beyond what people intended. That's where secrecy's power is, and that power is often contradictory. It doesn't just do one thing. It doesn't just move in one direction. It moves in multiple directions—sometimes diametrically opposed directions.

Today when governments, businesses, or other organizations keep secrets, we really need to look at not just why are they keeping the secrets, but what happens to those organizations? What happens to governments? What happens to businesses when they keep these secrets? It's not just one thing. For those businesses and governments, they also need to realize the consequences of keeping secrets that may not be apparent, because they can see that secrecy does one thing for them. They can't necessarily see what it does to them. To understand secrecy's power, you need to see what it does both *for* a group of people, as well as *to* that group of people who are keeping the secrets.

BD: After you finished the book, what did you move on to?

Chilson: While I was finishing the book, I started studying Ikeda Daisaku's leadership of Soka Gakkai. I did that for a while. I wrote an article on his diary as a way of showing how he would engage with members of Soka Gakkai. I was very interested in how he was able to lead people by getting people to think about him as a mentor who would help them, and how his relationship with his own mentor was something that Gakkai members could benefit from as a model.

Also, at the time I had a graduate student who was a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, who was interested in doing a project on Buddhism and psychology. I suggested he do something on a Japanese meditative practice called *naikan* (内観), which is also used as a form of psychotherapy. *Naikan* means there's inner looking or introspection. He did an independent study with me on *naikan*. Then, I decided that I wanted to try a week of intensive *naikan*. Today there are about twenty *naikan* training centers around Japan, and you can go there and do a week of intensive *naikan*. What that involves is you simply sit alone behind a screen for a week, and you reflect on your life using three questions in relation to different people. The three questions are: what did I receive from a particular person at a particular time, what did I give back, and what troubles or difficulties did I cause? Typically, a person would start with their mother, from the time they started elementary school. When you first arrive on a Sunday night, you would start asking those questions to yourself in relation to your mother. What did I receive from my mother between the ages of seven and nine? What did I give back to my mother between the ages of seven and nine? What troubles or difficulties did I cause my mother between the ages of seven and nine?

Then, after about ninety minutes or two hours of reflection on those questions, someone called an interviewer would come in and very ritualistically ask, "What have you been examining about yourself during this time?" Then, the person would answer, "I've been examining myself in relation to my mother, between the ages of seven and nine." Then I would answer more questions: "What I received from my mother was she baked me a chocolate cake on my eighth birthday. She helped me with learning how to do division. Then, what I gave back to my mother at that time was I helped her clean the garage, or whatever. Then, what trouble or difficulty did I cause my mother? I had an ear infection, and I kept her up all night because I was crying in pain."

After I report that, then the interviewer simply says, "What will you examine yourself on next?" Then you do the next three years, so you say, "I examine myself in relation to my mother between the ages of ten and twelve." You go through the relationship with your mother, and then you do your father. If you're married, you do your spouse. Then after you do those three people, you come back and do your mother again, which is typically around day four. I did that. I became really interested in that as a form of psychotherapy that grew out of Shin Buddhism, and the fact that the founder of it was a Shin Buddhist who had done this in a lay organization. That's mostly what I've done the past couple of years.

BD: Is this the future direction of your research?

Chilson: Right now, yes. I've written a few articles, and I'm trying to write a book on *naikan* from the perspective of Buddhist psychology and how it fits in with Buddhist psychology. There are some interesting parallels with mindfulness, where you have a Buddhist practice that's then adopted by medical practitioners and professionals as a way of healing. To do that you have to remove the Buddhist language, so mindfulness is no longer Buddhist. A lot of the Buddhist language has been removed from it, and that was presented as a therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction.

BD: Back to Peter Knecht. You were involved in producing a special issue of *Asian Folklore Studies* in 2007. In fact, it was the last issue of the journal before we changed the name to *Asian Ethnology*. How did you reflect on your time with Peter and your experiences as his former student and then colleague? What was your overall experience of doing that?

Chilson: Scott Schnell and I wanted to do something to mark the end of Peter's career as the editor of the journal. We decided to do a special issue of *Asian Folklore Studies*. The interesting thing is that we came up with a list, and we started writing to people. Every person we wrote to said yes to doing an article for the special issue in memory of Peter. We only got so far into the list, and everyone said yes, so we actually had to stop. It's already a pretty thick issue as it is.

Certainly people were very eager to participate and celebrate Peter's career. Then we had one of Peter's former students write a piece on his life. Peter told us a little bit about his life, and Scott and I wrote something in the introduction about that. Peter was not always forthcoming with details about his life, but at least he was then. He was more interested in getting the journal out in a way that his footprint wasn't in it. He was supportive, but I think he was also slightly embarrassed. He perhaps had mixed feelings about doing a special issue on him, since so much of his career was to make sure the attention wasn't on him but on the contributors and their scholarship. It was a good way to honor Peter. I'm very glad that Scott was a leading force in doing it.

BD: You edited the book *Shamans in Asia* with Peter when you were still working as the associate editor of the journal. What do you recall from that?

Chilson: I always wanted Peter to write a book on shamans. We had long conversations about shamanism. When I was an undergraduate, he taught a seminar that focused largely on shamanism. The things he knew about shamanism and the way he presented them, they were just so fascinating to me that every time we were talking about it, I would say, "Peter, please, it'd be great if you could write a book on shamanism." He always had the same answer: "Clark, it's never going to happen. I don't want to do it. I'm not going to do it."

We had all these articles on shamanism in *Asian Folklore Studies*. At the time, these were not easy to get hold of. Unlike today, we didn't have the issues online. There wasn't a book out there that covered shamanism in Asia in different countries with an expansive view of it. I proposed the idea to Peter that we bring together these articles that he had edited over the years. He said, "Okay." We talked with an acquisitions editor from Routledge. We explained that the book was not just going to be a rehashing of the articles. The two things that were different were that it was going to be indexed, so you can compare what's going on in different countries. Also, Peter would write an introduction, which would give a framework to shamanism in Asia as a whole.

Even though he wouldn't write a book on shamanism in Asia, he was willing to write that introduction. If anyone's had a chance to read it, it really is a very clear introduction to the elements of shamanism in Asia. Unfortunately, Peter didn't want to take that and expand it to a book. But he did write an incredibly important introduction to thinking about the field. I know Peter has written a number of things on shamans both before and after that, but in terms of an overview, that really captures the extent of his knowledge and scholarship on shamanism in Asia. That's probably the best introduction, and it will be useful for a very long time. He still does work on shamanism. Even last month he was in Mongolia or China. Maybe one of these days, I can convince him to actually write that book.

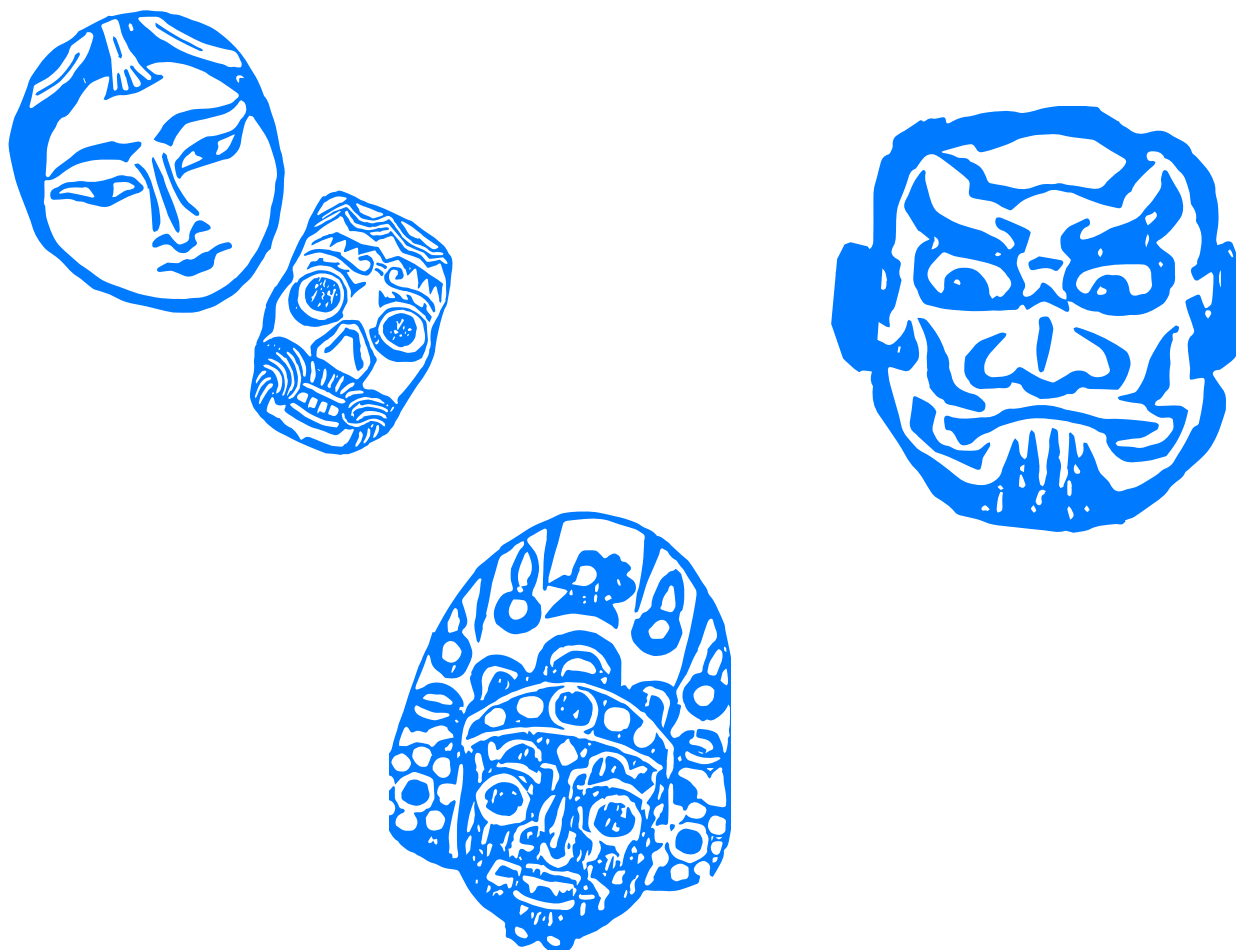
Now that I do this practice of *naikan*, I've also been doing research on *naikan*. You think about the people that have had an influence on your life. You go back and look at those questions. What did I receive? What did I give back? What troubles or difficulties did I cause? If I do that in relation to Peter, I think, "Wow, so much of what I know about Japan came directly from Peter. So much about the way I think about what makes a good scholar and how to do scholarship comes directly from Peter. I would be a very different person if Peter had not been both my teacher and my mentor in the world of editing journals."

Then, you think of the second question, “What did I give back?” Not very much, frankly. I did a lot of taking. In terms of the troubles or difficulties I’ve caused Peter over the years: not getting things done on the journal in a timely enough fashion, and keeping things slowed down. That happened more than once. Peter is a very good correspondent. He writes me frequently. I’ve not always been the greatest correspondent back. I think of my relationship with Peter through the perspective of my own research now and I think, “Wow. Peter really has been a tremendously important person in my life.”

Related Texts

Chilson, Clark. 2014. *Secrecy's Power: Covert Shin Buddhists in Japan and Contradictions of Concealment*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chilson, Clark, and Peter Knecht. 2003. *Shamans in Asia*. London: Routledge.



Japanese New Religions, Media, Women, and Violence

Erica Baffelli



Erica Baffelli is a professor of Japanese studies at the University of Manchester. She works on religion in contemporary Japan; new religions; religion and media; religion and the internet; religion, women, and violence; as well as Japanese studies. She guest-edited, together with Jane Caple, a special issue of Asian Ethnology entitled “Religious Authority in East Asia: Materiality, Media and Aesthetics” (78-1).

Ben Dorman: Let’s start with your initial interest in studying Japanese society. Why did you decide to do that?

Erica Baffelli: I started with studying Japanese language. I enrolled in Japanese language and literature at the University Ca’ Foscari of Venice. When we reached third year, we had to select a specialization, and I picked Japanese religion and philosophy, as it was called. That included also taking courses in Indian religion and philosophy, on China and Japan, and also some modules on anthropology. I must confess I didn’t know much about Japan. I didn’t have any particular interest in Japan, so it was quite a random choice I made when I was eighteen.

BD: How many languages are you familiar with?



Baffelli: I studied French when I was at junior high, then English, and then Japanese. Italian is my first language.

BD: To study an Asian language was very different from what you had done before?

Baffelli: Exactly. The other reason was also I really liked philosophy when I was in high school. The idea of expanding beyond the Western philosophy that we studied was also another thing that attracted me to Japanese studies and culture, which was in the East Asian studies program at the time. The only way to study something that was outside the Western philosophy was to enroll in an East Asian studies program. I also liked math and physics at the time, so I didn't really have a very clear idea what to do. Venice as a city was also quite attractive, which was another reason I went.

BD: Why did you start studying new religions of Japan?

Baffelli: That was also quite by chance at the beginning. In the second year in Venice, I applied for the Erasmus scholarship to study in another European university for one year, and my first choice was Paris. During my year in Paris, I attended some classes on Japanese new religions by Jean-Pierre Berthon, who was an expert in the field. My interest started from there. I had already taken one module on Japanese religion in Venice that I found really fascinating. I was very interested to see how people in contemporary Japan were practicing religion. I found Professor Berthon's classes very interesting, and that is when I decided that I wanted to focus on new religion for my BA/MA dissertation in Venice. The reasons for my choices were a combination of randomness and also the people I met. Both my professors in Venice and France were highly influential in my decision to want to study Japanese religion.

BD: Was that Japanese religion in general, or was it the study of new religions in particular?

Baffelli: New religions in particular. I've always been more interested and quite curious about people and why they do things. I've always been quite interested in talking to people and seeing why they were practicing religion in contemporary Japan. I was much more interested in looking at what's going on now more than textual approaches to premodern religion, because I liked this idea of interacting with people and also seeing what was going on in contemporary society. My interests moved quite quickly toward new religions.

Then there was the media aspect as well. I was quite interested at the time in looking at media, because this was another class I was taking. There was a media, society, and religion course that was quite interesting. Also, I was in Paris in the late nineties, and it was when the internet was spreading around. The internet was starting to get attention, and some of the early work about the internet and religion was starting to appear. I didn't have funding to come to Japan to collect primary sources. Studying magazines or newspapers would have been much more complicated at the time, because we didn't yet have the databases that you can now access online. I thought studying the internet would have been useful too, because I could access the primary sources without having to spend long periods in Japan.

When I then finished my first degree and entered the postgraduate course, I could spend more time in Japan and started doing more interviews as well. For my first small dissertation, I was mainly interviewing webmasters via email. I started doing online interviews at the very beginning, because it was the easiest way to talk with them and access the materials.

BD: Did you meet the people you initially connected with via email and interview them in person?

Baffelli: Later on, I met some of the webmasters I initially interviewed. Of course, the conversation was not just about the internet but about the use of other media as well, so the area I looked into expanded. At the time, it was mainly email. There were no social networks, and email was very slow. It was still very useful to start a conversation via email and then have a face-to-face discussion. I sometimes found it easier to do the reverse—have a face-to-face interview first, and then continue the discussion via email. I do it quite often with people I interview, and when I look over the field notes, I might have questions to follow up on via email.

BD: What religious groups have you concentrated on?

Baffelli: Agon Shū is an esoteric Buddhist organization that was founded in the late seventies but was also previously founded in the fifties. The leader is called Kiriyaama Seiyū. He passed away in 2016 when he was ninety-five. They perform this big event in February known as the Star Festival, where there is this very big fire. It is devoted to the spirits of the deceased and also for your wishes. This is their main event. A lot of the organization's teaching is about pacifying the spirits that cause all illness and misfortune, so one of the central ideas of the organization is cutting the karma, getting rid of all these hindrances caused by unhappy spirits.

Kōfuku no Kagaku is an organization founded in 1986 by Ōkawa Ryūhō, who was at the time very young, in his thirties. They've been changing teachings and adding different types of teaching over the years, but one of the main ideas in the organization is this creation of Utopia, or Utopia and Earth. This ideal world is based on the principle of happiness. There are several spirits living in each of these dimensions. Since 1991–92, they consider the leader to be the rebirth of the Buddha. He's also able to have spiritual messages; initially they were from deceased people, but more recently he can also have these spiritual messages from protective spirits of people who are still alive. They span from religious figures to Donald Trump, Putin, and so on. They talk to Ōkawa in Japanese, and then this is usually published in a book. Or there are now also public performances of these *reigen* spiritual messages, and they give indications about current social issues, politics, and so on. The group also has a political party, the Happiness Realization Party, founded in 2008, and also some schools. The idea of Utopia encompasses not just the religious spheres but also spheres like education, politics, and economics.

The final organization, Aum Shinrikyō, was also founded around 1984. Initially as a yoga group, and then it increasingly became an apocalyptic group talking more and more about the end of the world and the proximity of the end of the world with the coming of 1999. The leader was Asahara Shōkō. One of the characteristics of their organization was that some of the members lived in communes around Japan. They were renunciants (*shukke*), giving up everything, entering the commune, and living together with the other members.

The group is notorious for the 1995 sarin-gas attack that was perpetrated by some of its members and several other crimes they committed before that, including killing some other members or people that they thought were against them. The group was officially dismantled in 1999, but there are now two splinter organizations, Aleph since 2000 and Hikari no Wa since 2008. Hikari no Wa is funded by some ex-members, while Aleph is in a sense the continuation of Aum. Some of the members stayed in the organization. Hikari no Wa has been quite vocally detaching itself from Aum. It wanted to be recognized as a different organization. Aleph doesn't really make many public declarations in general. It has been quite cautious in talking with the media in particular.

BD: How did you get in touch with ex-Aum members?

Baffelli: It was a combination of different ways. With some of them, I started getting in contact a few years ago when I was working on the internet. After a few years, I went back to look at the internet when the social networks had expanded, and I just sent an email and asked if I could go and meet and talk with them. They replied saying yes. Initially I interviewed the PR representative of the organization, but then I started attending some more of their training sessions, some of their other events. My network started expanding, and then from there I started interviewing some of the other members. Tracing ex-members outside the established organization is quite difficult, simply because you don't know where they are. I've been contacting some of them through the social networking I find. Or I've been told about some blogs that were written by ex-members, and I contacted them through their blog. Other cases are people that I knew before, and I knew they have left. Some of them contacted me, saying, "We left the organization," and I interviewed them. Sometimes people I knew put me in contact with some ex-members. I was trying to be very careful not to interview only people in the same circles, because then of course it's limited and raises an issue. I'll try to use different ways to reach out to them to see if they are interested in talking.

It's also a slow process, I may say, having collected several interviews. It's time-consuming every time, but I'm quite keen on trying to reach a very diverse group of people that have been members for different lengths, or they joined in different periods, and they also left in different periods. So far I interviewed people that entered in 1986–87, the very beginning, and others who entered in 1992–93, very close to the sarin-gas attack period. Some of the members I interviewed left immediately after the sarin-gas attack, and some I interviewed left three or four years ago. Their experiences are very different, and I'm quite keen on trying to have the greatest variety of voices I can. Of course, it is not an easy task, because they are not necessarily part of a specific organization or network, and some of them for very obvious reasons don't want to be found.

BD: When you interview people, do you go in with a specific set of questions, or do you just let them talk about their experience? For example, would some people want to talk about their views of the media on Aum or something like that?

Baffelli: They usually ask me what I want to talk about, and, in that case, I may send them some of the topics I would like but also say it doesn't necessarily need to cover that. Also, if any of these topics make them uncomfortable, we can just simply not talk about that. Usually the interview starts with them telling their stories. I just ask, "Can you tell me your story?" In that case, some people may start from their childhood, and some may start from the moment they joined the organization. It's very different. I have had very long interviews that lasted five or six hours.

I ask questions during the interview, but I tend to let them also select the topics they want to talk about. Because what I'm most interested in is memory, what's happening in that experience that is memorized. What are the elements that ex-members think are important in constructing their narrative about their experience. I try as much as I can not to guide it too much but to have them talk about their experience. My questions tend to be clarifications about what at the time I have not understood. Or when they mention teachings, I might have to clarify some of the teachings they are talking about. Or then if a topic comes up that I'm particularly interested about, I may ask if we can talk a little bit more about that. I tend not to have a list of questions.

BD: Do you see themes in what they present?

Baffelli: Yes. My recent interviews have mainly been focusing on ex-members, and I've been talking with a lot of women. Some of the preliminary interviews are looking at issues related to a set of practices and discussions about the body—how the body is described, and how those practices are described. Then issues about how training was performed, a lot of discussions about relationships and community, and also often a discussion about how the external world sees them.

How the media narratives have influenced some of the narratives of the ex-members is a very interesting topic. Some of the narratives are in response to those, to try to rectify things by saying, "This is not really what happened." Or in some cases they'll say, "Yes, that is true, that is how it was." There is usually quite a lot of discussion about either some specific documentary, TV representation, or magazine representation that they want to respond to and say, "Well, this is not really what's happened," or "This is quite accurate as a representation."

The public discourse about the organization is one of the themes, but also another important theme is what happened afterward. How the separation happened from the organization, and what were their challenges or not, and how they dealt with it. Also how they now see their previous experience, how they now interpret or conceptualize being in that organization for that time. Then there is usually a discussion about violence, the definition of violence, or violent acts.

These are the emerging themes that I'm starting to look at, but I will stress it's still very preliminary. Then what I tend to do after the interview is to write up the transcript and send it back. There was a case recently where one of the people I interviewed sent me back their response with additions and said, "Oh, there are a few points I need to clarify a little bit more." There were a few points she wanted just to add a little bit more explanation about.

BD: We had an experience a few years ago together when we went a Kōfuku no Kagaku facility in Nagoya. This is a very interesting group to me. What has been your experience working with the group, particularly from the perspective of media representation and also members' self-perceptions?

Baffelli: When I started contacting them, at the beginning they never replied to my email. I decided to just go to one of the centers. I entered the center and explained who I was and why I was there. I said, "I'm a PhD student. I'm working on your religion and media." At the time, I still wasn't completely sure that they would have been the main focus. I was interviewing several organizations. "I would like to ask you a question." Again, luck is a big part of fieldwork experience. There was a member there that was extremely welcoming, and we started talking.

Then she started introducing me to some of the people. Some of the people I knew in that first year are still working in the organization. Over the years, I could see them having children and going back to work. They move into another department, but I will usually try to contact them and then ask if I could go and visit some of the centers. Compared to the beginning, I noticed that the following year there was a little bit more openness toward researchers or giving access. At the same time, it's always important to keep in mind that you might not have access to everything you want.

There might be parts of the organization or the practices that are precluded to you. In my study with them, the idea was mainly to look at how media were used in the very beginning of the organization, the late eighties or early nineties, and how the tension with large publishing company Kōdansha was dealt with at the time in the organization. I was not going to do many interviews with the members. I interviewed people working at the magazine and in the publishing house, and I attended quite a lot of events. I ended up talking with a lot of members.

There are usually a lot of suspicions toward journalists and media in most of these organizations. A bit of distrust of academics as well, but in the end, I don't think they're seen as being as problematic as the media. One time I was told, "Well, even if you write critically about us, in the end at least you came and talked to us and collected the material." This organization was aware that the researcher's publications won't reach a million people. Probably less problematic than a magazine attacking the leader in a sense. Some of those organizations now understand that.

BD: Right, because the academic's role is—

Baffelli: —different. But there is always this tension that I'm sure you're very aware of as well, a distrust of all academics. But also, we don't want to become the academic voice of the organization, and it is a really subtle line that we all have to balance. At the end of the day, the fieldwork is an encounter. You're asking these people you're meeting to share a lot with you, including a lot of very private things, and there needs to be an exchange. Sometimes the exchange can be they want you to talk about your thing as well. There is a negotiation, in a sense. Sometimes it's also a very traumatic discussion. It's an encounter where I don't really think you can just go and ask them to share everything with you without offering anything. But it is a really fine line, and the negotiation is not always easy. Personally, I found it emotionally quite difficult sometimes.

BD: Yes, it can be tough. I've been asked to join a number of different groups at different times when I asked them questions. They started seeing me as a potential member. Does that happen to you?

Baffelli: Yes, with Kōfuku no Kagaku. It doesn't happen with ex-Aum members, because they are quite aware that I won't join. Well, some of them are ex-members and not part of the organization. But even if they are part of that organization, they're quite realistic about there being no possibility for me to join. But it has happened with other organizations. When you say no, it means they accept that your access can be limited. We won't be allowed to do some of the practices or activities, but this is something that is a choice and needs to be taken into consideration.

BD: In your book *Media and New Religions in Japan*, you're covering some of the groups that you mentioned: Agon Shū, Kōfuku no Kagaku, Aum Shinrikyō, and Hikari no Wa. Do you think these new religious

groups grasp the importance of media, or do they try and reject it to a certain extent? How do they see the media outside themselves?

Baffelli: It is a constant tension. They understand the importance of the mainstream media to have their voice heard, but at the same time they distrust the media as not being able to represent them correctly or to only focus on scandal. Some of them are seeing social networking, in particular Hikari no Wa, as their way to be able to reach out without the mediation of mainstream media, because they can have their YouTube channel, blog, and Twitter. That was very useful at the beginning of the organization in order to make clear their statement that they were detaching from Aleph and setting up something new and different.

Some other organizations like Agon Shū have been struggling with the new media. They set up a very beautiful new website a few years ago, but over the last year it was barely updated. There was no mention of the death of the leader on the website for months. They have a Facebook page and a Twitter page, but they mainly post lists of quotes from publications or announcements about events. The interactive part of social media is not really developed. This might be due to the fact that there might be nobody in the organization that is interested or able to do it.

Most of the interaction between members occurs when they attend events and collect pamphlets there. They get information that way, or they receive the organization's publications at home. This is still their main means of communication. They rarely appear in other media, except during the main festival in February, where local TV might run a small program about them. There are usually one or two paid ads appearing in newspapers about the event. At the end of 2018, one of the Kyoto local stations had a small program about the end of year event at their main center. But such media coverage is rare.

This is an ongoing tension in relation to external media representation within the religious organizations in general. But in the case of new religions, this is even more so. The "older" new religions are establishing themselves in a way that is really similar to traditional Buddhist organizations. There is a family affiliation, which is several generations down. The push for proselytism is probably less intense than in some other groups. They use their own media, but they don't put that much effort into appearing in the mainstream media. As for the more recent ones, there is always this tension between using or mistrusting the media, saying that the media is something that will just criticize and attack them, but at the same time wanting to be visible.

BD: Are there things that you've learned from Japan, the Japanese experience, and your work with new religions and media that you see correlations with in other areas of research?

Baffelli: Definitely. I've seen this more and more recently. It would be interesting to have a little bit more comparative research or a research group that looks at issues from different angles. One that keeps coming up recently is that it will be very interesting to have a little bit more work together with scholars working in Asia and Southeast Asia. For example, when we talk about contemporary Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, Korea, or Southeast Asia, it would be very interesting to have much more dialogue between scholars about them, something that I cannot do because of the lack of language expertise to access those materials. But there are people out there doing very interesting research in this area, and there could be some very interesting comparisons. Of course, there are different historical developments and different contexts, but at the same time similarity in some themes appear. That would be an area that would be very interesting to have more about.

With women and violence, I've been working quite a lot with an anthropologist colleague in Copenhagen who works in India. We have been discussing quite a lot of projects looking at women's participation in organizations that commit violence, violent acts, and their experience. There is a lot that hasn't been done in that area as well, especially when we look outside some of the contexts like Islam. In some other contexts, there is still quite a lot that could be done. There are a lot of Japanese case studies that could contribute to general understandings of those dynamics.

My very recent work on Agon Shū is a book manuscript that I just completed with Ian Reader (Baffelli and Reader 2019). It looks at the life of a new religion in the first generation, from the foundation to the death of the leader. It all started because we realized that we had field notes on that group spanning from the eighties, when Ian did fieldwork in Japan, to now, because I picked up Agon Shū from the 2000s. We have thirty-five years of material that we can look at and see how this organization did in its first generation. We are using Agon Shū for case studies, but the dynamics we look at can be applied in other contexts and with other case studies. It is not so much a book on Agon Shū but more about the life cycle of a new religion in the first generation, and the fact that they sometimes can get old quite quickly, even in a span of only thirty-five or forty years. What are the dynamics of this change?

Of course, the impact of the death of the leader on the organization is something all religious organizations have to deal with or have dealt with in their history. In the final part of the book, we discuss divinization of the leader, and we look at some Chinese cases in particular. Again, the idea is to have a Japanese organization as a case study, but the dynamics can be translated into different contexts and used to create a dialogue.

BD: What are you working on now?

Baffelli: The last few months were devoted to that book on Agon Shū. Now I want to go back to the project on women, religion, and violence and start working on this material. The idea is to look at the representation of Aum women in the media, because they tended to be portrayed either as beautiful, evil, and younger—they were attractive and entered that organization—or as the neglectful mother, or the problematic daughter. Also, I'm quite interested to look at how they were portrayed in the organization's publications, because some of them were profiled quite a lot early on in the magazine, and some of them published some books. I want to look at those narratives as well, because again, they are creating a specific ideal of a female member. Then listening to the voices of course creates a much more complex picture. Also, some of those voices respond to that representation, and this is something also I would like to look at. There is quite a lot of work to do in that area.

One of the other problems is that most of the publications by ex-members are from male members. Their discourse about Aum has been from a male member's perspective. Except for one ex-member's recent book and two books from Asahara's daughters, all the books by members are from male members. Some of them are currently on death row. We have much less about the women voices in the organization. This is an interesting aspect as well, but it's still quite an ongoing project.

I also just started on a new project that looks at healing practices across Asia. I would like this also to be more comparative. I'm currently working with colleagues who are working on India and Okinawa in Taiwan. We would like to look at a more historical approach. But my aspect will be more on the healing narrative. Discussions about the body and health are constructive in some of these groups' narratives and conversion stories. It's still something we are thinking about, but this is the idea. It would be very interesting to bring in people from different contexts and disciplines.

Related Texts

Baffelli, Erica. 2018. *Media and New Religions in Japan*. New York: Routledge.

Baffelli, Erica, and Ian Reader. 2019. *Dynamism and the Ageing of a Japanese "New" Religion: Transformations and the Founder*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Religion in Contemporary Japan and Changes since 1991

Ian Reader



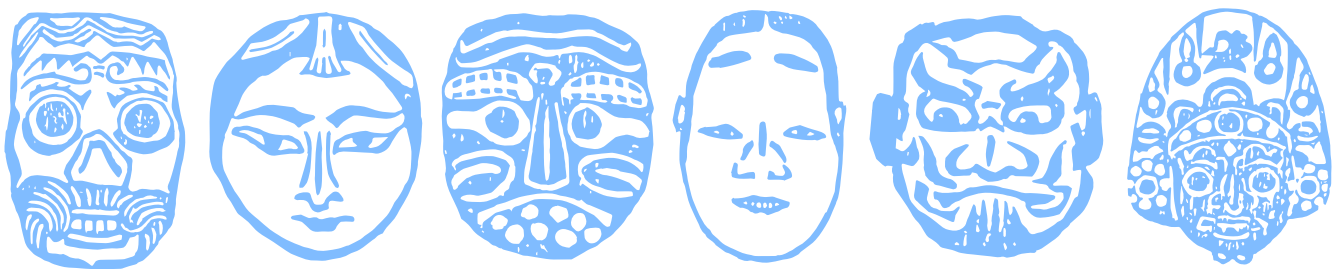
Ian Reader is an emeritus professor at the University of Manchester. His research has concentrated on religion in Japan, religion and violence, and pilgrimage, among other topics.

Ben Dorman: Your book *Religion in Contemporary Japan* where many people, particularly students, are familiar with you. That's how they came to you in the first place, with that book. It was published in 1991.

Ian Reader: That's right.

BD: What has changed in contemporary Japan since that time? What changes have you seen in religion?

Reader: There have been quite a lot of changes. That book was written after I'd been living in Japan for a few years, teaching and being interested in what was going on in the streets, temples, and wherever. I was also lecturing at a university about religious practices in Japan. The book came out of the classroom but also from my observations at the time. The 1980s was a period when you had these very new movements appearing. Things related to religion seemed very popular. They had what often was referred to in the media as the Pilgrimage Boom. Pilgrimage numbers, particularly for the Shikoku, were going up and up every year. It seemed to be a time of a lot of vibrancy. In fact, the leader of one religious group in Japan I know said to me not long ago that he read my book when he was a student, before he entered



the leadership of this religious group. He said he's read it since, because it reminded him of a time when religion was popular in Japan.

It's changed, because you've seen more individualization, so that the social structures that supported Buddhism in particular have been eroded. You've seen lots of demographic changes, which have eroded the structures of Buddhism, particularly in rural Japan. You've heard a ton against religionizing, particularly after the Aum affair. The phrase *shūkyō banare*, "being distant from religion," has become a catchword, and attitudes have changed.

I wrote an article in 2012 raising a number of these issues, looking at what I called the rising tide of secularization. "Secularization" is a very broad term, which can mean all sorts of things connected with the turn away from religion and the moving of religion purely to the private sphere. There are multiple secularities as it were, but one of the themes of secularization as originally used by sociologists was the decline of religion. Not just the retreat of religion to the private sphere, but the decline of religion. I was talking about the decline of religious behavior across the board. Not just people not joining or being part of religious organizations, the Buddhist sects struggling, but also even things like the decline in the numbers of people using *butsudan* [Buddhist altars] in their homes and so on. There have been lots of changes like that.

BD: Some people write about different spiritual movements and so on. Do you see that as being part of religious formation, or is that connected?

Reader: It's connected, but I also think there's a lot of desperate attempts by sociologists in religion in Japan to try and "prove" that in different ways religion is still going on. A lot of that is quite spurious. Whenever I talk to people about, "Well, tell me, give me some real empirical evidence to show that there is this huge upturn in spirituality," I've never seen any. People don't do it. People say, "Oh, well, there's so and so happening." Scholars of religion often fail in their academic work, because they are always trying to prove that religion is popular in some way, because they think that justifies their job. It's equally as important to look at when it's disappearing and why. That's as much a part of the process.

I haven't seen that much evidence to show that the so-called new spirituality movements are actually making up for the numbers of people who are leaving religious organizations. For every one hundred people who leave a religious group or have no connection with religion, you might get a very few, maybe twenty, who go to some new spirituality thing, do some yoga, put city clothes on and dance around the flower pots, or whatever they do. Sorry, that sounds a bit cynical.

But there's a shift. There are more individual practices. In Japan, now there's less of the idea that, "Oh, we've been brought up in the Jōdo-shū or the Jōdo Shinshū, and that's what my family is, therefore we must carry on having a *butsudan* and carry on doing that stuff." People are getting away from that. Some of them might then start trying to do a bit of yoga or whatever, but that doesn't mean to say that there is a continuation of the flourishing of the religious and spiritual type stuff.

BD: Going back to *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, there's a bit of work on the group Agon Shū. You mentioned about the use of satellite telecasts and things like that. My understanding was at that time Agon Shū was quite a flourishing religion. Erica Baffelli told me about a project you worked on together where she looked specifically at Agon Shū (Baffelli and Reader 2019).

Reader: As you know, Erica and I have worked together on a number of projects. We were involved in editing the book *Japanese Religion on the Internet* (Baffelli, Reader, and Staemmler 2010). We did a special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (2012) on the aftermath of the Aum. We've written articles together and so on. We wanted to work on a book together, and, as often happens, when you start working on a book together with somebody or when you're writing it yourself, the book that appears isn't the book you started with. We wrote an article about what we saw as the contest between Kōfuku no Kagaku and Aum Shinrikyō in the 1980s and early 1990s, and we thought we were going to do a book about competition between new religious movements in that era.

BD: That would have been really interesting.

Reader: I know it would have been really interesting, but we didn't do it, bad luck. Somebody can do it, but it ain't going to be me. As we were doing this, we wanted to look also at Agon Shū. As you mentioned, I worked on Agon Shū a bit in the 1980s, mainly because it was there and it did this wonderful big fire ceremony, which was what first made me become aware of it. It seemed to sum up a lot of the dynamism of that age. It was very technologically advanced, and it made a big thing about using satellite TV and all sorts of technological broadcasts welded to these wonderfully "traditional" fire ceremonies. It was playing with that. It was also critiquing established Buddhism, particularly esoteric Buddhism, and saying it was trying to open up esoteric Buddhism to ordinary people. I found that very fascinating, so I wrote some articles about it and had a chapter in *Religion in Contemporary Japan* on it. It was one of the growing religions of the age.

When I met Erica, it turned out she had been working on media and new religions, and one of her subjects was Agon Shū. She'd come across my work because of that. She started doing research on Agon Shū in the early to mid-2000s. I'd done a little bit more work. I'd gone back to Agon Shū briefly in 1995 and 1996 because of the Aum affair, looking at the impact it had on Agon Shū. Then Erica and I both started doing a bit more work looking at Agon Shū again when we were doing the internet book, and so on. It just struck us that between us we had this thirty-year history of looking at Agon Shū. That became a big part of this book.

Then in August 2016, Kiriya Seiyū, the founder of Agon Shū, died. Erica happened to be in Japan at the time, so she was able to go to the funeral. She was able to do some interviews with people there and look at how Agon Shū was handling that. Then we gave a talk together in Germany about Agon Shū in early 2017. While we were doing that, we started thinking, "Agon Shū is becoming the center of the book. Maybe I ought to go back to Japan and look at the Hoshi Matsuri, that big event again." Before I knew it, Erica had booked me onto an airplane to go, because we had a little bit of research money.

I went off and did some more interviews with Agon Shū, attended the Hoshi Matsuri, collected more material, and it became clear what was happening. They were transforming Kiriya from the founder and leader into basically the second Buddha and a major object of worship. We became aware that Agon Shū was aging—and in one generation, in the lifetime of the founder. Whereas it was at the cutting edge of technology in the 1980s, it didn't look anywhere near the cutting edge by the last few years. We would look, and it was clearly not as dynamic, it didn't have so many members, and so we're looking at the transformation of a new religious movement.

We ended up writing the book on it, but it's all about the aging of a new religion (*Dynamism and the Ageing of a Japanese "New" Religion*). It's about how movements can shift from being very new and very dynamic to being something else. Within it, we also look at the issues of charisma, because Kiriya, the leader, was very charismatic and powerful. We look at the ways in which movements deal with a loss of charisma and the transformation thereof. How they are interpreting the loss of founders, because according to Agon Shū, Kiriya now speaks from beyond the grave to them. We're looking at his spirit messages. We touch on issues of money as well in new religions. Very importantly, we're not only looking at charisma but also looking at and critiquing the notion of "new religions," because they are a problematic, outdated category.

BD: That will be very interesting. When does a new religion cease to be new? It's always been an issue.

Reader: It's been an issue, but the Japanese way and analysis of it has always been to talk about generations or eras in which new religions appear but without treating the old ones as old anymore. In the 1980s, Agon Shū was described as a *shin shin-shūkyō*, a "new" new religion, to try and differentiate it from earlier ones. Then you started getting this slightly weird terminology coming out like *kyū shin-shūkyō*, "old" new religion.

Gradually it became evident that this was problematic, so we've made some comments in the last chapter about this issue. As far as I can see, Agon Shū is becoming like a very established religion that has all the same elements of age and so on as the other old religions. In terms of new religions, there's also been a problem that the old traditional Buddhist studies have never really accepted new religions as

legitimate religious groups. Using the term “new religion” helps to make a distance between what many consider to be the “old”—and therefore “good”—religions, which of course are pretty much moribund themselves. We want to break that barrier down too.

BD: It’s really the contemporary scene that you’re focusing on now, with Erica attending the funeral.

Reader: Yes, Erica doing the funeral, and me doing the Hoshi Matsuri, where Kiriyaama’s relics were enshrined on the altar bang in front of the relics of Shakyamuni. In chapter five, we discussed all these and how we see the founder displacing the Buddha. There’s some interesting stuff coming out of Agon Shū to “prove” that he is more powerful.

BD: They don’t have one particular person replacing him?

Reader: No, he is still the leader. There’s a great photograph from the Hoshi Matsuri festival that we’re going to include in the book, where the chief ritual people, the current leader of Agon Shū, is performing the fire ritual. On a dais above him, higher than him, is Kiriyaama’s seat, which is empty. The symbolism is that Kiriyaama is there. Agon Shū always broadcasts everything, of course. Also during that ritual when they enshrined his relics on the altar of the Hoshi Matsuri, there is this fantastic shot. I took a photograph of it on the big screen. It won’t come out very well, but there was this fantastic shot on the big screen from behind Kiriyaama’s chair, so you’re almost in Kiriyaama’s chair. Like he was there in spirit watching his own relics being enshrined on the altar. There’s some fascinating stuff going on there about the founder memorial, founder commemoration, veneration, and the preservation and elevation of charisma, and so on. There is an official leadership on earth as it were, but Kiriyaama is the guiding spirit.

But we also look at the rising tide of nationalism in Agon Shū, because they started to worship at the Yasukuni Shrine. Kiriyaama became good friends with Ishihara Shintarō, the right-wing nationalist, and started to articulate a revisionism about the war, which is quite fascinating. It looks like they are appealing to an older generation. There’s a bit of wartime nostalgia in there and so on. All of that is in the book. There was a kind of *yamato damashii* (“Japanese spirit”) undercurrent, and there were always Japanese flags everywhere. There was a kind of implicit nationalism. Added to which they did the Hoshi Matsuri on February 11, which is Constitution Day, but it also has its symbolism in Shinto mythology. There were practical reasons that it was the Hoshi Matsuri, the star festival. That’s traditionally done at that time of the year. They wanted to do it on a public holiday, so that they could get more people coming. February 11 fitted nicely there.

There was always an implicit nationalism, and that was also part of pretty much all the new religions of the 1980s, which was when Japan was on the rise. It was like the era of Ezra Vogel’s book *Japan as Number One*, but in their perception Japan *is* number one. There was this sense that “our time has come,” and the message from all of them was that Agon Shū was going to spread Buddhism for the new age to the world. It was from Japan to the world. It was the same with the Byakkō Shinkō (a new religion), from Japan to the world, and all of those groups did it. There was always a kind of Japanocentric dimension to it.

BD: Does Agon Shū have overseas branches?

Reader: It does have some. It’s made attempts to expand overseas. It’s got something in London, for example. As far as I know, it’s never really been successful overseas. Very few movements have. I mean Sōka Gakkai, yes, and Sekai Kyūsei Kyō in parts of Africa and Latin American.

BD: I want to get back to the start of this project, which was a book concerning Aum Shinrikyō and Kōfuku no Kagaku. You’ve published quite a bit on Aum, and religious violence became a strong theme in your work. What do you see now as the impact of that affair that happened in 1995?

Reader: I’ve worked on Aum Shinrikyō, and I stumbled into that by chance really. Often that’s how these things happen. I was living in Scotland at the time, which would have been the evening of that day in Japan. On the morning of March 20, 1995, I got a phone call from the BBC asking me if I’d ever heard of a group called Aum Shinrikyō, because the subway attack had happened that morning in Japan. The rumor was it was Aum, and everybody was trying to find out something about Aum.

The BBC was phoning various people up, and nobody knew about it. I happened to say, "Yes, I know something about them." They did a five-minute interview with me, which of course then made me the world expert in Aum Shinrikyō, after which I thought I'd better do some research on them. I did all sorts of research, from reading all their materials, to going into some of the trials, to interviewing members of Aum, and all that stuff. I published on it. That led me into that discussion of religion and violence, which, of course has been a big topic for a long time.

I doubt whether a week goes by without somebody still contacting me to ask me something about religion and violence. I've taught some courses on it. I've tried to widen it out. I was also interested because I do have an underlying interest in murder, serial killing, and things like that. I've always had that. Not from a practical point of view. Although I have been working in this university system, being tempted at times as one is, but I've always been interested in the dark side of human nature and why people do these things.

I was fascinated by how in Aum Shinrikyō these themes came out, where clearly in their vision of the world and their religious view of the world, violence became legitimated. As I started looking at that, I started reading on different groups. Whether it was Jonestown and Waco, or all those famous new religious movements, Islamic movements, and then leading on to even genocide movements and so on, looking at the underpinnings of all those processes. I've been interested in that for a long time. I've taken part in all sorts of conferences and written widely about it. As somebody once said to me in a conference, "Oh, you're the Aum guy." You've mentioned religion in contemporary Japan, and you've now mentioned Aum. You do stuff, and you think you're going to move on. But you're carrying it around forever.

BD: Right. What sort of things are going on these days that reverberated from that?

Reader: We talked about new religions and the history of *shinshūkyō*, new religions in Japan. They come in waves. You can see there's always going to be a new one popping up. In fact, there's been very little that's come to the fore since 1995.

BD: It's not just a natural degeneration, but would you say that the affair had a very negative impact on religions?

Reader: Yes, a very negative effect on religion. In the work we did together on media and religions in Japan, you discussed Hosoki Kazuko and how she didn't want to call what she did "religion." That was an impact of the Aum affair. Certainly, from that point of view, another theme that's been brought in through the Aum affair is this whole issue of mind control. The idea that religions pervert the mind, control the mind, and so on. People say, "I don't want to go to religious movements because of mind control," which is a very flawed explanation of Aum. But it's why people don't want to go to religious movements and so on.

Linked to the idea of mind control, you've had a movement in Japan, the anti-cult movement, to try and "rescue" people from the cult. That's been a big problem too, because it's almost as if the idea that you deviate from the norm in any way by going to a movement, a religious group that just doesn't fit with nice old comfortable conservative patterns, is in itself a piece of social deviance. There was an interview that I had with a senior member in one of these anti-cult movements where he was basically legitimating the idea of forcibly dragging people out of these movements and deprogramming them. Which is, of course, a process of mind control in reverse, also called mind control. He was justifying this on the grounds that if people were in these movements they're crazy and mad, and they need to be rescued. You've had this legitimation of the suppression of so-called problematic groups.

I can't remember how many years ago it was where I helped or consulted with a human rights organization called Human Rights without Frontiers, which is based in Belgium. They were writing a report that went to the UN Convention on Human Rights about Japanese infringements of human rights, particularly over people involved with Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. They said there were cases of people being kidnapped from the group they were in.

Now, whatever you think of those groups, people have the right to be in them. They were being kidnapped from those groups. Even though complaints were being made to the police, they were being ignored. You've got all sorts of themes going on there, infringement of rights and so on. Of course, we know that there's been legal changes, and in a sense it's probably strengthened some of the right-wing political movements as well. The impact has been massive.

Related Texts

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Folklore, Folklife, and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Frank Proschan



Frank Proschan is an anthropologist and folklorist with a specialization in Southeast Asia. He has worked for the Smithsonian Institution and UNESCO. He was interviewed by Frank J. Korom, the coeditor of Asian Ethnology, who is a professor of religion and anthropology at Boston University.

Frank Korom: How did you choose Southeast Asia and the area of specialization? Your career took a lot of turns here and there, but you ended up at UNESCO. How did you get from Austin to UNESCO?

Proschan: I grew up in the Washington, DC area. As a child, I always hung around the museums and wanted to see what was going on in the city. In 1967, the Smithsonian established the Festival of American Folklife, as it was called at that time. As a teenager I attended the first festival. Then when I finished high school in 1970, I began working as a volunteer, and then in the following summers as a minimally paid staff member. I knew from that first festival that folklore and folklife were going to be my life. I worked at the Smithsonian, and then I went away to school at Chicago. In fact, I took an anthropology course with Victor Turner, one of the eminences of the day. At the time, in 1970–72, it was very clear that what I was interested in doing didn't really have a place in an anthropology department like Chicago, so I dropped out. I came back to Washington, worked at the Smithsonian, and worked in a record store to pay bills between festivals.

In 1975, I returned to the Smithsonian on a fulltime basis, gearing up for the Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife. To honor the 200th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Smithsonian's festival was chosen as one of the main Bicentennial events. My work on that continued through the end of the festival into the 'seventies, including the reconfiguration of the festival after 1976. Ultimately, I decided in



1978 that I was tired of doing the work and having other people credited for it, because I was a college dropout. I was non-credentialed. I was an enthusiast, but they always needed window dressing of someone with a title and a history in the matter. I went to Texas and decided to first finish the undergraduate and then get the graduate degrees.

FK: Texas at that time was an interesting place. You had Richard Bauman there, Roger Abrahams, Américo Paredes. That must have been really exciting to be a graduate student in folklore there.

Proschan: It was. I always told that to other students that I would meet at conferences along the way. I'd hear their horror stories of faculty members whose only job was to tell them, "No, you can't do this, you can't do that. You can't study this topic, because someday I would like to study that topic, and if you do it now, then I won't be able to do it later." When I would visit family in the San Francisco Bay Area, I'd meet students and colleagues at Berkeley. In the very shadow of the Campanile are all of these languages that have never been documented, ethnic groups that have never been really studied in depth, and students that did want to work with them. There was always this ethnographic veto of their professors saying either, "You can't do it for political reasons", or "You can't do it for my personal agenda." Either, "I would be interested in doing this", or "I'm not interested in you doing that." Therefore, students were always told no.

Texas was the opposite. It was, "We may not be able to support you or give you feedback, but we're not going to veto what you want to do."

FK: What was it you wanted to do?

Proschan: When I arrived in 1978, I was finishing up a project at the Smithsonian. The international puppeteers organization, UNIMA, was organizing its global triennial or quadrennial meeting and festival in Washington in 1980. In preparation for that, at the Smithsonian we began a project in traditional puppetry. I took parts of that project to Texas with me. We got a grant from the National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) to organize an academic conference, and a documentation project interviewing several the traditional puppeteers that the Smithsonian was bringing to perform at the same time as this UNIMA convention and festival. We did have a systematic documentation of puppeteers from India, Egypt, Belgium, and Italian American Sicilian puppeteers from Brooklyn. That was what kept me busy.

The first couple of years I was in Texas, one of the things I was most interested in was the use of different voice modifying devices by puppeteers around the world: instruments that they would put in their mouth to attenuate normal speech. It has different names in different areas, but the idea was to replace normal speech with the voice of the puppet, which would be this abbreviated, attenuated version of human speech. It was still understandable because the prosody would be the same. In some cases, you could reproduce the vowels but not the consonants. It was a reduced version of speech, a surrogate for normal speech. I wrote and published on that.

I'd found out along the way that this was also a typical Asian practice for various instruments outside of the context of puppetry, often in the context of courtship with a Jew's harp or a flute. A boy would come to a girl's house and use the Jew's harp to utter sweet words of love to the girl, under the scrutiny of the parents. Ostensibly the parents weren't supposed to know what he was saying. But it was a way of courtship that had been traditional throughout Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

I was kicked out of an anthropology course that was oversubscribed and wound up in a field methods in linguistics course. The professor was working on a little mini-grant to look at some of the Southeast Asian refugees who had been settled in various parts of Texas. I accompanied him at one point on one of his trips and met some Khmu people from the highlands of northern Laos. Knowing about this tradition, and being interested in the speech surrogates with the puppetry, I said, "Do you have this too?" They said, "Of course we do, doesn't everyone? But here in Texas we're only six or seven families. No one here has that, but if you ever go to California, that's where all the Khmu are." They arranged to introduce me to the larger population the next time I would be in California. They introduced me, and I followed up. I met some of the families in Stockton, which was one of the largest populations at that point. That gave me my trajectory for the next few years certainly and the topic for my PhD studies.

FK: You were doing diaspora studies before the term even became popular within academia in a sense, although you were doing it under the rubric of ethnic folklore, if I'm correct.

Proschan: I was doing it under folklore and verbal arts ultimately, but I got support for the doctoral fieldwork so I could move to California and live in Stockton. I was also doing social service, social work. We set up a social work agency, in fact, which worked with all the Southeast Asian refugee populations in Stockton, helping with the pragmatics of day-to-day life like getting to the doctor and translating at the hospital.

I had never published or written on the topic of diaspora, but I was certainly studying a diasporic community. I can remember doing a small talk at lunchtime back at Berkeley, on how some of these mountain villages had essentially been transplanted to California. And in terms of the resettlement patterns, how family kinship networks and localities in Laos had been reproduced, mapped onto the geography of Stockton and Richmond.

FK: What about the language? Did you have to teach yourself the Khmu language, or did you take a course at Austin? Or how did you learn? Just by interacting with people in Stockton?

Proschan: I learned through interacting, as I've done with most of the languages that I speak.

FK: Which ones do you speak?

Proschan: At this point, probably Vietnamese is the best. For that, I took a total of twelve ninety-minute lessons. At one point, I was in Hanoi for twelve weeks, and I took twelve lessons. Also Lao and Thai. In Texas I began working with Cambodians and trading Cambodian lessons for English lessons as a folklorist. Of course, our work is often recording texts, oral-tradition stories, or poems. You must translate those, and that then becomes a means of learning all of this obscure and useless vocabulary: the names of these plants, animals, and all sorts of "useless" knowledge. Then you must make it more useless by learning the Latin and scientific names.

FK: That's amazing. You're a polyglot. Then, after you got your doctoral dissertation completed and approved, what was the next step in your career?

Proschan: I did my doctoral fieldwork in 1984–85 in Stockton and then came back to Washington to work at the Smithsonian for another extended spell. I had a three-year position at the Smithsonian, which kept me from doing the writing that I should have been doing when the dissertation research was still fresh.

FK: That was again at the Office of Folklife Programs?

Proschan: It was, at that point, yes. That position wasn't renewed. I had an NEH grant to do a translation of Khmu oral tales. NEH said, "But you can't receive this grant if the topic is in any way connected to your doctoral dissertation, and it's not yet finished. NEH doesn't sponsor doctoral research or dissertations." I said, "Well, the dissertation is on poetry, and these are texts, tales, narratives." They said, "No, no, no." I said, "Show me in your rulebook where it says that I can't do a related topic." They, of course, couldn't find a place where. Anyway, I had to finish my doctoral dissertation because I was going to lose this year-long \$30,000 grant, which at the time was substantial money for a research grant. I finished the dissertation, got that out of the way and submitted, and applied along the way for a Fulbright.

Through the mid-1980s, I returned to the Smithsonian from the doctoral fieldwork in California, worked at the Office of Folklife Programs again, and began at that point to travel to Asia. All my doctoral research had been done with expatriate refugee communities living in the United States. I had never really wanted to visit Asia. I had always tried to avoid working with the Vietnamese Americans as a research topic because the refugee politics in the United States was so complicated and fraught. With the Lao and the Khmu, I could manage that a little easier.

At the Smithsonian, I had the opportunity to visit Southeast Asia. I wanted to go to Laos and Cambodia, but first you have to go to Vietnam. At that point, the United States didn't have diplomatic relations

with either Cambodia or Vietnam. The United States didn't even recognize the Cambodian government of the time. There was a Lao embassy, but from the Lao government side, they weren't allowed to issue visas. The only way to get to Laos or Cambodia, which were much closer to my research interests at the time, was to first go to Vietnam and establish your bona fides with the Ministry of Interior, the security police in Vietnam. Once that was done, the fraternal socialist countries of Laos and Cambodia would make it possible to visit.

In Vietnam, I had the names of a couple of scholars who had worked on Khmu. There's a classic work of Vietnamese ethnography from 1934 about the alternating songs of courting-age men and women in the Red River Delta, outside of Hanoi. It turned out that the son of the man who had written this classic work was also an ethnographer and working in Hanoi at the Institute of Ethnology. I met him along with another expert who had worked on Khmu, and it was a real meeting of the minds.

At the Smithsonian, we had some small programs for international exchange. I wrote a grant application and got money to bring a couple of Vietnamese visitors, a Vietnamese and Lao in fact. The Lao, of course, never responded to the invitations and couldn't get permission to travel, so we were able to bring three Vietnamese instead of two. They came to Washington over the course of 1989–90. Then in 1990 I went back to both Laos and Vietnam to begin to try to do the research with Khmu, initially. Then over the years many other topics arose.

FK: Was the political scene difficult to navigate in terms of doing independent research there?

Proschan: In a certain way my counterparts in Vietnam, like the Texas example, ran interference. They understood very well what I would like to do. They knew what was possible, and they could always make a counterproposal, "We can't go here, but we can take you there. This is a border district. With the permissions and administrative procedures it would be impossible to take a foreigner to do research in district X, but we can take you to district Y." I was flexible enough and understood the situation well enough to understand that they were making every effort to find common ground to facilitate this collaborative research.

At the time the Vietnamese basically said, "We must accompany you, and it has to be interesting for us as we're not a travel agency. As an Institute of Ethnology, we're not simply going to arrange and facilitate travel for foreign researchers on topics that are not of interest to us." But again, there turned out to be enough topics of mutual interest and locations that were accessible that we could begin to do fieldwork in Vietnam.

I backed off Cambodia, because by that time there were a number of young American scholars who were much more prepared than I was, learning Cambodian fluently instead of just learning a few words as I had. Laos was still an interest, but working in Laos was always very difficult. Even though I ostensibly wasn't interested in Vietnam, all of a sudden that was where I wound up focusing much of my work over the next several decades.

FK: Then at what point did you go to Indiana University? I remember you were there at that institute for semiotics for a while.

Proschan: I had a Fulbright to do work in Laos and Thailand in 1990–91. In Thailand I was autonomous: I would catch a bus, I would get to the village, I would introduce myself. I would do my research on Khmu oral traditions and ethnography. In Laos, the permissions never came. We did a few short trips, but most of it was just sitting in Vieng Chan waiting for permission, and ultimately going back to Thailand and getting the work done. Then making another trip to Vieng Chan and waiting again for permissions. Then going back to Thailand for more productive work. When the Fulbright ended, I was invited to come back to Indiana to take a position as a research associate in what was then the Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies.

FK: That was founded by Thomas Sebeok, wasn't it?

Proschan: It was founded by Thomas Sebeok. It turns out among those that had had exactly the same

job position as me were people like Michael Herzfeld, just before me, and then earlier Julia Kristeva. I'm not sure I will ever live up to the prestige of the position.

FK: You were in good company. Quite an honor for you.

Proschan: It was a good opportunity. It was a research faculty position, which had the possibility to offer courses but no obligations. The assignment was, "Do good work, bring honor to the university, and develop outside funds."

FK: How successful were you at the latter?

Proschan: When it ended, it was, "Develop outside funds and we don't care about the quality of your work or the prestige you're bringing to the university." The dean told me that in as many words. He said, "This is no reflection on the quality of your scholarship. We did these studies, and it's costing us more than you're bringing in." As it began it was like, "Get your research funds, bring in some revenue, and there's this karmic balance that will ultimately come. If you do enough good things and are bringing in money, then the job will continue." Ultimately, at the end it was, "We looked at this, and we're abolishing this thirty-year-old research center because it wasn't paying its own way anymore."

FK: That, in effect, was the end of your romance with Indiana University. Then what did you do?

Proschan: Then I went back to the Smithsonian. Back through the revolving door.

FK: Your base, basically.

Proschan: Right. I took refuge again at what was by then the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. In 2000 I was brought into the Smithsonian to operate a project called Save Our Sounds, which was an effort to digitize collections of sound recordings of great historic and cultural value at the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian. I was the administrator of that project.

FK: Was that through Folkways Records, or was it a separate project altogether from that?

Proschan: It was complimentary. We were digitizing recordings from the collections of the festival itself, as well as some 78s from Moses Asch and the early Folkways years. The Library of Congress was focusing on a couple of specific collections of their discs, cylinders, and so on that they had not had time to digitize.

FK: When did you transition to UNESCO?

Proschan: I continued my work in Vietnam, and it was while managing this Save Our Sounds project. The Smithsonian was also a place that would welcome and encourage other projects. I continued my collaboration with Vietnamese, Thai, and other Southeast Asian colleagues on museum training programs and ethnographic field methods. We did a workshop on radio documentation and developing audio recordings, in the pre-podcast era before anyone there had ever imagined the notion of editing interviews and sound recordings into radio programs.

We operated several different exchange programs and training programs in Vietnam and some of the neighboring countries. The focus for the last couple of years I was at the Smithsonian was on developing a collaboration among the countries of the lower Mekong region, Yunnan province in China, and then Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia to develop a thematic program at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2007 that would cover the shared and distinct traditions of those entities.

We again had support from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations to conduct several training programs in each of those countries, to train researchers from those countries in the methods of documentation and preparation for an outdoor festival like the Smithsonian Festival. Developing that kept me busy from 2004–06. Somewhere in 2005 I applied to UNESCO, and somewhere in 2006 they called me for a phone interview. Six months later I got a job offer, and three or four months later I finished up some other Smithsonian workshops that were already in the pipeline and got to Paris to work. I took the position at UNESCO in the office that was responsible for the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

FK: Tell us a little bit about that document. A lot of people have heard of it but aren't really quite certain what it says.

Proschan: That's true. Especially among many of the states that have ratified the Convention, you have the sense sometimes that they may not have read it, and if they read it, in many cases they don't really understand the full implications. The Convention is a very subtle document. Any kind of an international treaty or convention is a process of negotiation, compromise, and encoding certain values and premises in language that is not always transparent. They can sometimes be very opaque.

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is an example of that. It was negotiated in a very quick timetable in 2002–03, partly in the wake of the events of September 11 in the United States. That was in part based upon misunderstandings among peoples with different value systems, customs, and cultures. It was very much a twenty-first-century convention, built upon some UNESCO initiatives that had been underway for twenty or thirty years by the time it was negotiated in 2001, 2002, and early 2003. It's a very forward-thinking convention. It stands the test of time better than other conventions, even those contemporaneous with it. It has within it the seeds of all sorts of wonderful things, as well as probably a few seeds of some unfortunate developments.

FK: Give us a sense of your average workday at UNESCO in Paris. Did you travel a lot, or were you working out of your office mostly? What things did you do to preserve the intangible heritage or to implement related policies?

Proschan: The Convention was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2003, and then it began a process of ratification. Countries around the world decide whether to join or not. I was brought on in 2006 when the Convention had very recently entered into force. It had reached the minimum number—twenty-four countries had ratified it. Then it becomes a binding instrument among those countries that ratified it, and the Convention came into operation.

I was there not at the drafting stage but at the birth of the implementation. That meant organizing the governance meetings, policies, and sub-laws. The Convention is like a constitution, and under the constitution you have laws. Then under the laws, you have regulations, and there are multiple layers of obligation and binding. There is the Convention, and like the constitution, it is the ultimate law of the land. Below that would be the equivalent of laws that have to be decided by all the states that have ratified the Convention. Then below that are several guidelines, policies, procedures, and so on that are comparable to regulations. We were building those from scratch.

The UNESCO Secretariat is a staff of professional international civil servants, but the governance of the Convention is a matter of the democratic processes of the states that ratify a convention. We as the Secretary would prepare drafts. They would go to these meetings, the meetings might accept them more or less as is; they might edit them, change this word here or that word there; or they might tear them up and say, "How dare you? This is not what we asked you to do. Come back to the next meeting with a different draft that reflects our views more closely." There were several mechanisms that had to be put into place in those early years, the last few years of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Much of the work then was supporting that process.

Prior to the Convention there was a parallel and complementary initiative, the program of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, which had been established by UNESCO in 1999. The first declarations of Masterpieces were in 2001, 2003, and 2005. A number of expressions of heritage from around the world had already been recognized by UNESCO as Masterpieces. The guidelines for the Masterpieces were the last gasp of the nineteenth century playing out at the end of the twentieth century. They were all very much bound up with notions of uniqueness, authenticity, and outstanding value that was going to be determined by some scientific process. An expert jury meets and looks at these nominations and proposals, and through their brilliance and knowledge of all the world they are going to then choose what these so-called Masterpieces were. It's a very nineteenth-century, outmoded notion, out of

step with the best work that was being done among anthropologists and folklorists, not just at that time but for many decades before that time.

The idea though was to find a focus and visibility for this concept of intangible cultural heritage that UNESCO was concerned to introduce, as an alternative to certain terms like “folklore,” which had very negative baggage in many parts of the world. In Latin America, among the Spanish-speaking peoples, folklore was *folklorico*, this notion of stage performances of ballet ensembles performing. In Western Europe, Nazi use of folklore during World War II left a very unfortunate connotation to the term “folklore.” It was the worst form of nationalism. Similarly, in other parts of the world “folklore” evoked certain notions that were not what the best minds of the day were advocating. Even if, in America, scholars had rehabilitated the old term and tried to make something of it or substituted the term “folklife” in place of folklore, that didn’t work at an international level. UNESCO then came in the eighties and nineties and was struggling to find an international term that would capture this area of human activity in a way that could then be acceptable on a global basis. It came up with this term “intangible cultural heritage.”

FK: Give us a few examples of the things that are on that list.

Proschan: There were a lot of Asian court traditions. A member of the jury was interested in the comparative court traditions of Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and China. Of course, you had to have those. The Kunqu opera is probably from that period, and the gong tradition in Vietnam was part of the third proclamation. For Cambodia, the Royal Ballet.

There were a few interesting things, things that even a decade later would not have been possible. In the Philippines, there was a ritual tradition from a Muslim area that ten years later was essentially inaccessible to Filipino researchers and even to the government. But this tradition had been nominated and identified earlier. In Malaysia, there was a mediumship and spirit possession ritual that was put forward by the federal government in Kuala Lumpur, but almost against the will of the state government. It was heterodox and anti-Islamic in the view of the fundamentalist state government, but the federal authorities had put it forward for recognition.

FK: Those wouldn’t be the things I would expect to find on the list. I would think that things like Tuvan throat singing and the performance of the Gesar epic in Central Asia might be included. When you said courtly traditions, it threw me off there for a moment.

Proschan: Well, there were also several oral epics. They were any number of the *mugham* because every country had to have its own *mugham*. All the countries of Central Asia each had a *makam* or *mugham*, or the same tradition under a slightly different name. Of course, they had to have their own. There were a few multi-country nominations. There was cooperation between Mongolia and China for the Mongolian epic, the long song, the *Urtiin duu*.

FK: Were there any identified in the United States?

Proschan: The United States was not a member of UNESCO till 2003. It couldn’t participate in this program. I don’t think there would have been a will for these proclamations from the people who would have likely been involved from the US side, for any number of reasons.

FK: Now that you’ve been doing this for more than a decade, what do you feel is important in this whole project of attempting to preserve intangible cultural heritage?

Proschan: The Convention is a result of a negotiation. It’s full of compromises. It’s imperfect in important ways, but it also has within it the kernel of concepts that, if carried out in the spirit of the Convention, have the potential to completely transform national cultural policies around the world. Essentially, to recalibrate the relations between the communities that are responsible for cultural practices and the so-called experts and government agencies that arrogated to themselves the responsibility for those practices. Part of that is because the definition of intangible heritage in the Convention is groundbreaking and not always appreciated, even by the countries that ratify the Convention. I like to say that the

definition is circular, but we know that a circle is the most perfect form. Intangible heritage under the Convention is what any given community identifies as its intangible heritage and uses as a source of cultural continuity and self-identity.

There is a circularity about it, but it also means no one else can decide on their behalf.

It's not a matter of we as scholars saying, "I see that, it's an element of intangible cultural heritage. I see that is intangible heritage and that's not." The rules have changed. At this point, 170 countries around the world have accepted the definition, which whether they know it or not says the rules have changed. Now it is up to any community—and only that community—to decide for itself what its intangible heritage is, how it should be safeguarded, whether it should be safeguarded, or whether it might better be abandoned because it's not in keeping with principles of human rights, changing circumstances, or the changing expectations and aspirations of that community itself. What the Convention requires then because of this is that communities be involved in making free and informed cultural decisions.

FK: Would you say it's a vehicle for empowerment then? To put their own culture back in their own hands and to express it as they desire?

Proschan: Exactly. It puts forward the principle of cultural self-representation. It's for each community to decide for itself how its culture should be represented to itself and others. Part of the circularity is that the community is constituted by the heritage that its members identify. The community must identify the heritage, and, having done so, the heritage then constitutes the community. That can become a dynamic process. The community can shrink or expand, and those who affiliate with or attach themselves to forms of intangible heritage may change over time. The heritage itself is always changing, and that's part of the definition as well. There's not a fixed form, and if there is anything that the Convention and the experts drafting and implementing it have declared very clearly, it is that authenticity is of no relevance to intangible cultural heritage. It's for each community to decide what its heritage is. Authenticity can only be determined through fiction of external expertise or scrutiny, and that's of no interest to the Convention in its definitions and fundamental premises.

As a process of compromise, unfortunately there were a few tensions in the drafting process. A number of scholars wanted to continue this honorific program, like the Masterpieces, some international honor that would be given to certain forms of recognized intangible cultural heritage. There would be this annual or biannual process of filtering and selection.

Other scholars said, "This is completely crazy. We know how pernicious the effects of that can be. It can create problems at the local level within the communities concerned, create this international competition, and there's all sorts of very predictable effects. We've already seen the experience with the early years of the Masterpieces. We've already seen some of these negative effects, these unintended negative consequences. Let's do away with the lists. Let's focus on policies, safeguarding, and how to support states in their work with communities to safeguard the heritage those communities identify as relevant and important."

FK: UNESCO would be there as the support for the implementation of this.

Proschan: Right. States that ratify the Convention would take on obligations to other states. Again, what is in the Convention is the obligation that each state is responsible for safeguarding all of the heritage on its territory. Which is very different than the World Heritage Convention, which says that certain elite sites or monuments are of international value or outstanding universal value and therefore are the responsibility of all humankind and become the property of all humankind. Under the intangible heritage convention, the premises are the opposite, which is to say intangible heritage only ever belongs to the community concerned. Even if there's global interest in seeing that heritage safeguarded, ownership rests always and forever with the community.

Again, that's not always understood by the countries that are responsible for implementing it. A lot of the work that the Secretariat did in addition to drafting regulations and putting certain mechanisms in place for the Convention was to try to develop training materials. To develop the capacities of states, to

understand what their obligations under the Convention could be. Also then try to go beyond the state cadres, policymakers, and implementers to the communities, media, other civil society organizations, NGOs, and so on that are involved in this ongoing work, so that all of them then have a better understanding of the potentialities the Convention offers.

Because the Convention is a self-policing mechanism, there's no mediation or penalties. With the World Trade Organization, there's a dispute resolution mechanism. With intangible cultural heritage, there's no formal processes established by the Convention for mediation or quality control. It becomes a matter then for civil society, for scholars to understand as fully as possible what the Convention is about, so that they can then be the conscience. They can be the witnesses and say to their own governments, to neighboring governments, to the governments of the countries that they may be working in as NGOs or researchers, "You're not meeting your obligations. What you're doing is negative and counterproductive rather than likely to produce the result that you have taken on for yourself." This is not that the world is holding you to account for something that you didn't willingly take on, but you're not doing what you promised you would.

The Convention is at the point where scholars must subject its implementation to acute scrutiny that's very well informed. First about the concept of the Convention, but also about the particularities of local political formations, local administrative and bureaucratic contexts, the dynamics within a particular community—the rivalries, clans, personalities, and so on. Then there's a basis for comparative research and comparative scrutiny that can begin to provide the tools by which communities themselves, through strategic partnerships with NGOs, scholars, and media, can hold the governments accountable.



Urban Migrants in Rural Japan

Susanne Klien



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Ben Dorman: Why did you decide to write this book?

Susanne Klien: The whole thing started from research in Niigata, in Tōkamachi, where a contemporary art festival has been held for a long time. The Daichi Geijutsusai is part of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, which is a regional revitalization project with contemporary art highlights. I got into that research at first because I was very much interested in the perspective of the contemporary arts crowd. I had friends who were artists and were invited to that art festival. Later I got into the local crowd and met all kinds of local residents, who had quite different opinions of the festival. That was maybe the first opportunity for me to come into close contact with very different aspects of one and the same event that evoked more interest in rural areas. It also added nuance to the perception of rural areas, more than this idea of rural areas as nostalgic, quaint, nice, beautiful villages, and helped to understand them as something that is more related to the future.

BD: That's one of the issues that you addressed in the book, the images of rural Japan as *satoyama*, peaceful, rural places with aging populations, and so on. You're challenging those notions.



Klien: Yes. This is also related with the fact that my fieldwork has gone on for quite a long time. I was working on the book for nine years, and with the writing and everything it took more than a decade. This really gave me a chance to see the different changes in perception of the countryside, at the government level as well. In the book talk I also talked about the impact this had on media representation and perception. There have been all kinds of funding opportunities for people interested in moving to rural areas from cities. This has attracted a slightly different crowd of migrants compared to the people I was meeting in the very beginning of my research.

I got a time window on the gradual change that rural areas have been facing. Also in terms of monetary backup and lots of changes that migration has entailed. In other words, there have been more entrepreneurs, more younger people moving in. People have seen rural moves as career choices rather than just chilling out. This has also reinforced the sense of competition between lots of migrants, both physically but also on social networks.

BD: You mentioned nine years. We're recording this today on March 11. It's the tenth anniversary of the triple disasters. While we're on that point, I'd like to extend not only my personal sympathies but also those of the staff of *Asian Ethnology* and the Anthropological Institute at Nanzan University, to those people who were affected at the time and continue to be affected by those events on March 11, 2011.

I noticed that some of the sites you're looking at are among the ones that were hit the worst. How did that impact your perceptions of the country and also the people you were talking to?

Klien: I would very much like to use this moment also to pay respects to everyone who lost their lives in those areas. For me, it was a really devastating experience, at the same time as wonderful experiences, meeting so many new people in the field. What I also learned is that "disaster area" may be an expression that we need to handle carefully, because there are so many different and diverse areas included in these areas. Just thinking about my own three sites, Ishinomaki, Ogatsu Peninsula, and Kesenuma, which are in two different prefectures and quite a distance apart, the impacts were vastly different, depending on whether they are relying on fishing industries or other sources of income, what the rate of the aging population is in that place, whether they are very close to the sea, or whether they are higher up in terms of sea level. There are many factors, and this really makes it very difficult to think in terms of "disaster area" as a term, because it seems very generalizing.

Another thing I'd like to point out—and I've pointed this out already five years ago, when I was interviewed at some point—is the fact that the disaster hasn't really stopped. We keep forgetting that. Even commemorating, we take it for granted that there was a one-point disaster that happened. Unfortunately, the impact is still going on in so many ways. Just a few days ago, there was a news headline in Japanese media talking about high rates of suicides for senior, especially male, citizens who were still living in temporary housing until recently. Suicide among people who have been forced to relocate because of the disaster is something that is unfortunately still going on. We really need to think of ways to prevent this.

In a way, disaster attracts a lot of new people that were very necessary for a place, like in Ishinomaki for example. That has brought an influx of new ideas and new kinds of incubation as well, which is still going on now. There are new groups that have cropped up. At the same time, a lot of the older local residents were quite reluctant about this influx as well. There has been tension between older senior citizens, for example those who have been running a cafe for a long time, who saw this more like a threat to the local community, and those who enthusiastically embraced these newcomers. There's also a really varied understanding and reaction to some migrants.

Some of the locals would be very supportive, and they would actually organize certain events for those newcomers to settle more easily. For example, there was a local cafe in Tokushima, Kamiyama town, and a senior lady was organizing it regularly, because she said most of the newcomers, especially the ones without families, might not get the nutrition they should be getting. She was offering discounted meals for lunch. They were really excellent, very delicious meals. There's a broad variety of reactions to newcomers.

In that sense, the disaster areas may be different, because it was all a very sudden influx after the disaster compared to in other areas. People in those disaster areas of course were also quite happy about the support they received from disaster volunteers. There were positive reactions, mostly.

BD: In the past year, as in the rest of the world, Japan has been hit by Covid and the impact of that in various ways. Can you reflect on what the year has been like for some of the people in the areas you studied? Have you been in touch with people since it began, and how is it affecting the areas?

Klien: Yes, that's a great question. I can only give snippets, because last year I was not doing any research, for private reasons. I couldn't follow up very much across the sites I took up in my book. But talking with a long-term collaborator in Kamiyama town, who was doing a guesthouse before, she's still doing the guesthouse, but it's very difficult to sustain this. Local communities are even more reluctant to take in people now, given the fact that they have very few infections. Anyone coming from outside may, of course, bring the virus, and it constitutes a risk. Doing a guesthouse under these circumstances also carries an added risk for the guesthouse owner, but also toward the community. This is a bit of a mental issue, maybe. How do you actually sustain your business while also maintaining the relations with your community?

At the same time, as I've also described in my book, a lot of people have resorted to a lifestyle that entails many jobs, not only one job as we usually do in cities. This has turned out better for them during the pandemic, because they can hedge their bets much easier, with less risk. They take on seasonal work to compensate the loss from the guesthouse revenue and consult the local community to help them find some other jobs. They were actually saying that it's worked out much better for them than they anticipated, due to the deep engagement with the local community and the fact that they have been accepted in the new place. People with strong social skills were well embedded before, and they have been able to make it work. I haven't been in touch with many other collaborators who were aiming for a more self-contained lifestyle. I'm not sure how they've been faring these days.

BD: Let's talk about media representation. The media appears here and there throughout the book, and it's obviously an important part of it. It may be difficult to ask on an individual level, but to what extent were people influenced by media images in their decision to move or not? How you think the media has changed over the years?

Klien: Definitely, media representation and its impact is quite an important theme in the book, although I haven't picked it out as one chapter. Some people mentioned that seeing some documentary on NHK or seeing some images in journals or magazines made them decide to move to the countryside. One interviewee told me that he saw a documentary about *chiiki okoshi kyōryokutai*, this program by the Interior Ministry that provides funding for people interested in moving from cities to rural areas, and he decided to apply for it after seeing that documentary.

Another interviewee also said seeing pictures in these stylish journals and magazines about entrepreneurs who had managed to implement some ideas and actually turn them into a business also made her think about this option. There have also been journals like *Sotokoto* or *Turns* in Japan that are dedicated to introducing these themes to a large group of people, and they always come with very stylish pictures. It's clearly a departure from the *satoyama* images of quaint agricultural farming villages, more toward how you can actually get your IT business going in a small hamlet and look good while doing so. It's also about lifestyle and fashion choice, a more hipster ground here. It's really about people sitting in rivers with their laptops and enjoying nature and getting their work done at the same time. This is the new image they're projecting.

BD: You're suggesting some of the people might in fact be hipsters?

Klien: Yes, I guess so. I was living in Berlin before in a time when there was still a combination of local residents and incoming newcomers. Now, it's mostly newcomers. There's lots of cafes with freelancers working on their laptops and trying to look very good while doing so, but who also capitalize on neo-

liberal values at the same time. This is something I delve into in the book, this tension between trying to create something new while riding on the wave of neoliberalism, if we can say that. I guess it's a form of social change, and I'm trying to document the social change with ethnographic methods.

BD: Let's go on to some of the questions that we couldn't get to in the webinar. The first question was, "I'm interested in how multiple sites were chosen and if you think these can be representative of rural Japan. Are the experiences of migrants quite different, for example, between island towns and inland towns, or are they quite similar across multiple sites?"

Another question was, "Other than the *chiiki okoshi kyōryokutai* system, are there other top-down government-implemented strategies that have been successful in revitalizing rural areas?"

Klien: I explained this in the talk, but I have a wide range of field sites in my book. I tried to include remote islands as well as larger towns that are in mountainous areas. Also, I have a broad range in terms of history and topography, which obviously also shapes approaches toward migrants. Some sites had a long tradition of mobility and influx of people, while others were more isolated. Also some obviously are more oriented toward fishing industries, while others are farming oriented. That also makes a huge difference on an everyday life basis, in terms of values. Because I have such a wide choice of sites, it can be quite representative of rural Japan and all its facets. At the same time, some people might say that the number of interviews is still small. Compared to quantitative sociological studies, it's tiny. Since this was an individual project for a book, I was also looking at what I can do as a researcher. I took up a little bit more than one hundred respondents. That gave me insight into what's going on.

Despite the wide differences between sites, there were indeed common features that emerged after talking to people. One of those features was that people were making great effort to be included and integrated into the new places of living. At the same time there was also a sense of solitude, a sense of difficulty in actually being included in a very real and simple way. Most migrants had exposure to the local community through their work and daily lives. On a private level, it's of course another story. It also depends very much on whether you have a family or are single.

People with families were more naturally included in various activities. Some of them were not so desirable, like the PTA activities that were very time consuming and challenging for people who were not aware of or familiar with local rules and local ways of doing things. The problem is of course that there's no handbook on how to do things, because they're passed on orally. If you're not from the place, people still assume that you should know about this. But they don't know, and this can be a source of tension. For the singles, it's the difficulty of finding friends in the same age cohort because of depopulation. Being accepted as someone working freelance who might not work the normal office hours may also be something. People are not used to seeing that in their own countryside. This is also a problem some people mentioned.

BD: I noticed that you had 118 interviewees, thirty-five female and eighty-three male. There are a lot more males than there are females. Were there any reasons for this?

Klien: I didn't think very much about the gender balance while using this snowballing principle. I mostly relied on my interviewees to introduce me to other people. This is just the way it naturally played out. It reflects the overall gender distribution of some migrants. There are more male migrants, but the number of females has been growing recently. There has been a change. It's difficult to really keep track of concrete numbers, because despite moving, a lot of people leave their *koseki* or registered address as it is for a while. It's very tricky to get black and white figures on who is moving.

BD: Going on to another question from the webinar: "We have plenty of anthropological studies covering rural to urban migration, and they focus on finding community in the cities. Then in this book, we've got individuals, but do we have communities?" There seems to be a strong lack of interest in joining a traditional rural community. What does *inaka* offer that's better for some people?

Klien: That's a great question. First of all, on a very hands-on level, it's mostly that life is much cheaper. Living expenses are cheaper. You can get much more space for much less money. The downside of course is that you really need to have a car to move around in most places, because there's no public transport. That involves costs that we usually don't have to cover in cities.

At the same time, lots of migrants have networks among themselves, depending on the size of the hamlet or town. Some places have huge networks, like Ishinomaki. There was a whole infrastructure surrounding these migrants, created by these migrants for themselves. For example, ethnic restaurants that had not existed before to cater to their needs, or internet cafes to work in if you're just visiting for a brief time. There are places like this, but there are also other places that had only very few migrants. In those cases, they're mostly by themselves. They're trying to create their networks through online means, for example, rather than face-to-face means. This has also really expanded now with the pandemic. I just took a look at the *Turns* homepage, that magazine I mentioned before. They offer online tools for people that are moving to certain places. All the stuff that was happening before on a physical face-to-face level is now happening online. You can visit some places and check out what kind of atmosphere these places have and get a sense of what other local residents are like. There have been quite a lot of fundamental changes happening since the book came out.

BD: Another question is about paradigm shifts: "In the case of Japan, urbanization meant moving, and society has been on the move since Meiji. What do you think about this?"

Klien: I definitely agree that mobility is nothing new. I understand it's been going on for a long time—I'm thinking about the *Sankin-kōtai* system in the Edo period, which is a brilliant example. Also, there have been all these *tenkin* systems, people having to move for corporate reasons, mostly only by themselves rather than with the family. Such forms of mobility have been going on for a long time. However, they're mostly prescribed by institutions. They're not individual decisions. The people I'm writing about in the book mostly appear to be making their own decisions. It turned out that many of these decisions were shaped to a large degree by media and other people.

I'm interested in subjective agency and people wanting to move to try something, or to resist previous ways of how they should organize their lives, including employment, marriage, family, and the like. It turns out that some of the people I've been interviewing really hinted at the fact that they've been pressured into looking for and meeting up with potential marriage partners. This is also because rural areas are quite conservative in that way. They were actually implying that they're not so interested in doing this, even at a later stage.

The paradigm shift I'm talking about is not so much about mobility per se, but it's really more about reshaping familiar decisions, reshaping how work should be done. It's really an example of how the Japan we have known so far is not working anymore. It's just coming apart, it seems, and people are trying to come up with new ways. Sometimes by just postponing the decisions, sometimes by trying entrepreneurial activities. It's a very interesting, transitional time for Japan and individuals living in Japan, and this is what I'm trying to document in the book.

BD: Another question is about how each migrant is perceived by people in each region. It might be tough to respond to each person individually, but perhaps you could address that in terms of general perceptions?

Klien: It's a really important question. It was also pointed out in my reviews that these aspects, local perceptions, were lacking in my book. It's a very difficult question to respond to, because all the sites have very different approaches to migrants. They have different histories, economic circumstances, and social circumstances. Of course, mostly they were welcome. Because of the demographic decline, rural areas urgently need newcomers for various reasons. However, many of my collaborators expressed difficulties in being accepted at a deeper level. One of my collaborators married a local and was divorced after a while. After that, she contemplated moving back to Tokyo, but she said she liked living on that remote island so much that she decided to stay, which is really courageous after having such a difficult private experience.

How people get integrated is really very diverse. Some people say that they're making a huge effort. Some people say that they are making less effort, because they realized that actually they just hit it off better with other newcomers. There must be something that divides people who have spent all their lives in that place and people who've relocated. A lot of people also mention that they find it very refreshing that they can meet up with people cross-generationally. In cities, life is mostly organized in a way that most people only get to work together with other people who are close to their age cohort, rather than a thirty year old meeting up with a ninety year old. In that sense rural areas offer a lot of opportunities for different generations to learn from each other and revitalize one another in different ways.

BD: The book title, *Urban Migrants in Rural Japan*, is clear. But let's look at the subtitle for a minute, *Between Agency and Anomie in a Post-Growth Society*. Can you just unpack that a little bit for us? Talk about the words that you're choosing and the reasons for that.

Klien: I use the term "post-growth" because it's really crucial to the themes outlined in the book. For lack of a better term, it's clear that economic growth is not at the core of people's minds anymore. Other themes have gained more importance in the discourse and in people's everyday lives, including people's wellbeing in a very comprehensive way. A lot of people are talking about *waku waku*, this kind of excitement or some larger thing that drives your life that you are passionate about. Of course, on the one hand this is a very positive thing, because it means that individuals have more options to reflect on things. On the other hand, it seems it's also a source of pressure. Although they were talking about *waku waku*, they're not quite sure what it was for them personally. Sort of like saying, "I'm going to find my *waku waku* quite soon I think." A lot of people are actually talking about this moment when they had reached their physical or mental limits, and they would have this type of crisis. For example hitting forty or hitting some other age, and they're not quite sure whether they actually can go on or whether they want to go on with it. That drove them to try something totally different.

One of my interviewees was a very busy editor in a very reputable editing business in Tokyo. He was earning lots of money, but he wasn't really able to manage his own time at all. He had very little time, even for lunch, and he couldn't choose the lunch he wanted to eat, because he didn't have enough time. He also always had very little sleep. That kind of lifestyle really takes a toll, and at some point people may think that they don't want to go on with this, because they can anticipate where all of this is going. They want to try something totally different from their previous work, like working in the fishing industry, which is really courageous.

As for the subtitle, *Between Agency and Anomie*, I was using these terms to show this tension for individuals trying to negotiate their lives after relocation. On the one hand they have this vision of carving out a more self-determined life. On the other hand, making this happen makes them so busy that many of them don't actually have the time to reflect—they don't succeed at having more time. It's a bit of a never-ending hope that sometime, someday they manage to get where they hope to get, but right now the reality is quite different. Some of them are even busier than before. Some of them are more precarious than before, but at the same time they do have a sense of fulfillment. Many of them say that their sense of satisfaction is higher than before. It really shows this paradox in people's lives about what they're facing. On that note, we got this question also during the book talk, about whether I'm an optimist or a pessimist.

BD: Yes.

Klien: Thinking about this a little bit more, I could say neither one. Hope, despair, and challenge really coalesce in most people's experiences. I was really hoping to document that through this ethnography.

BD: By "coalesce" you mean it's not so easy to separate the points?

Klien: Yes, at some moments they're juxtaposed. People experience a great sense of satisfaction, and on other days and at other moments they're really not sure how they can actually hold on. Maybe it's more about oscillating rather than coalescing.

BD: At the very beginning you wrote about how your own experience doing research reflects your own life trajectory, going from these moments of hope to moments of disappointment and so on. I really liked that aspect of the book, because it is very much the human condition, these moments where things seem to be moving on swimmingly, and then all of a sudden you get hit by a truck, life takes a different path, or the decisions that you make lead you from that to another area. I really appreciate that about the book.

Klien: Thank you. It's also quite close to the many experiences we have as academics. On the one hand, it's a very fulfilling profession on many levels, but on the other hand, there's also a huge amount of uncertainty involved. There's also this idea that you always have to keep on working. There's never an end or never a moment you can actually switch off on a mental level. That's why I also find it extremely easy to relate to people, because they're facing issues that I'm facing myself.

Related Text

Klien, Susanne. 2020. *Urban Migrants in Rural Japan: Between Agency and Anomie in a Post-Growth Society*. Albany: SUNY Press



Studying Food in China

Thomas David DuBois



Thomas David DuBois is a professor of humanities at Beijing Normal University. He is a historian of modern China and transnational Asia. His areas of specialization include religion, charities, and society in China; regulation and definitions of religion in China and elsewhere; and modern history of the Chinese meat and dairy industries.

Ben Dorman: Tell me what initially brought you to the study of modern China and transnational Asia.

Thomas David DuBois: What brought me to China is probably a story that a lot of your readers will share. I came from a fairly uninspiring place, the American Midwest. People describe it as a nice place to be from, but not really a place you want to stay. I always knew I wanted to see the world and go somewhere else. The question is why China? There are a lot of circumstantial reasons. I happened to go to a university that had a great Chinese-language program. Even beyond that, I've always had an interest in China. I remember seeing some cookbooks in my parents' house that had some Chinese characters in them. I could look and see as a twelve or thirteen year old where I had traced the Chinese characters and done my best to copy the recipes. The interest has always been there.

This is going to sound a little bit silly, but from the Chicago TV stations, we had kung fu Sunday, with these 1970s Hong Kong kung fu movies. This was a ritual for me and my little sister. We would just watch these with our eyes wide open, wondering what was going on. We also had one Chinese restaurant in our tiny little town. We used to go there once a week. The word "exotic" is not one we like to use these days, but it was just so fascinating for me, and there's always been a pull.



BD: You published extensively on religion, society, and nation, but you just moved into the study of food. Some of your recent publications include work on China's food retail market, cattle industries, and branding and retailing of condensed milk. Apart from your initial interest in China, why did you move into this direction?

DuBois: This is a new area for me. Hopefully, it's going to be food from here on for the foreseeable future, for a number of reasons beyond personal interest, and personal interest is certainly there. I had just finished up my third monograph. As you mentioned, it was about religion. Good things come in threes. In 2017, after the third monograph, I felt that I had said what I wanted to say and didn't want to be one of those people that kept repeating the same thing over and over, just to get publications out. This was also when I had moved institutions. I had spent much of my early career in Singapore and then went to the Australian National University (ANU). Then the same year the book came out I left ANU and just wanted to do something different. When you've written three books, the question is then what do you do for the fourth book? It's really a much more personal choice at that point in one's career.

I wanted to get back to China. I hadn't really been able to be rooted on the ground in China for as long as I wanted to be. I would be able to go back for a month or a few weeks, but not the same long-term deep experience that I had had when I was doing my dissertation. This is back in the late 1990s. I really wanted to go and do what I did for the dissertation, which is just wander around and see what I could see. I did have a plan, which was to do a project on soybeans. How did that come about? Even though I've written primarily on religion, I have a background in political economy. This was because I did work with Philip Huang at UCLA. Because I had written extensively on the northeast and I'm able to use Japanese sources, I had thought I would write a big book on the development of soybean production in the northeast, which doesn't sound very interesting. It's a key industry that developed that entire region, particularly in the early 20th century, so there's a good project in there for someone to do.

I did a lot of background research, applied for a big grant, and I got the big grant. It was in the city of Harbin, which is the place where the two big rail lines crossed. A wonderful, beautiful, interesting city. It is, however, not a city that I wanted to live in. I got up there, and I realized, "I just don't want to do this. I don't want to be working on soybeans for the next goodness knows how many years, and I don't really want to live in Harbin." It's a nice place to visit in the summer, but in the winter it goes to 40 below, which gets pretty tiring, pretty fast. The question is, what next?

What happened next was that I mentally went to regroup, and I went up to a place called Hulunbuir, which is to the west of Hailar. It's the very top of Inner Mongolia. You get inspiration from being in a place that you just connect to. I definitely did not have it in Harbin, and I definitely did have it in Hulunbuir. Hulunbuir has pasture land. It's got a big tourism industry, but it's also got a big ruminant animal industry, so primarily cattle and sheep. This is something interesting. Moreover, the real benefit for me was that it was something that was an absolute mystery. I've been in China since the early nineties. To come to a place and really be shocked, surprised, and not have a sense of what's going on—that's great. That's something I hadn't felt in a long time.

I had the luxury then of spending the next month just riding around in buses and meeting people. Why ride around in buses? Because if you're in a bus with somebody and you've got four hours on the road ahead of you, you can learn a lot of stuff. I learned all about the household economy. When do you borrow money? When do you sell your cattle? When's the best time to sell your sheep? Why do you have this breed and not that breed? What's the difference between this grassland and that grassland? This was the beginning. I knew I had to do something about these industries.

The first step from there was just to follow the production as it moved along. This is something that I later called "walking a production chain". Starting from the fields and who is there, I then literally just followed the cattle. You have a herder, and then there's a whole question of who is the herder, who has the right to the land, and their ethnic relations. Any piece of this process is eminently worth studying. If you go with the cattle, you go to a middleman, then the middleman sells to a slaughterhouse, and then a slaughterhouse sells to a wet market or to somebody else. They're all different paths that these products

can take. Each one has a very different web of human relations. That was the first real handhold I got into a food-based project.

Then, once I was in, I was really in. I started going around any place that had cattle, which as it turns out is everywhere. I was going down to a friend of mine in Hunan in the far southwest. I was also going to conferences and had other things to technically give me a reason to be in these places. One morning the friend of mine in the southwest gave me a call and said, "We have a cattle market in the morning, get down here," and so I did. This is in Dali in the far southwest, and the far southwest has a big dairy industry, so that opened up another world of questions. So I started to piece together a bigger picture, by looking at pastoralism in the northwest, the beef industry in the northeast, the dairy industry in the southwest, and the finance of the dairy industry and these other food industries in a place like Shanghai. Now the task is increasingly to put these pieces together. But it was a long time to get to this point.

BD: You're editor of and contributor to the book *Fieldwork in Modern Chinese History*, which is a research guide. Primarily the methodology is historical anthropology. Is it fair to say you're taking this approach and applying it to exactly what you're doing right now?

DuBois: The method that I use and this project very much grew up together. Yes, you've really hit the issue on the head.

BD: I'm guessing that as you travel around on buses and so on, you can really see how China is changing on the ground in different areas.

DuBois: This is one of the things I would never trade. I'm currently a professor of humanities at Beijing Normal University, and that means I'm really here. I'm a full faculty member at a Chinese institution and seeing things happening in China in a way that very few outsiders would have a chance to.

Returning to food, just one very small example is that nobody cooks anymore. The reason nobody cooks anymore is because nobody has to. Now, this is an exaggeration, all you people who cook don't write me nasty letters. People don't cook because Ele.me or these other delivery services have become so ubiquitous. Not just in places like Beijing or Shanghai, but in these smaller towns. They have really taken over large niches of the dining market. What's happening now with coronavirus, of course, is you can't get food delivered as easily. You can, but it's much more difficult. It's really interesting seeing how people adapt to this. I'm on social media and hearing from all these people that have no idea how to cook rice, because they have never done it, and these are people in their late thirties or forties. The change is happening, and it's happening before your eyes.

BD: I can just imagine what it would be like in China. I've only been to China once, and my image of the restaurants and so on is that they're incredibly social places. That's where so much interaction occurs between people and the whole food culture. What's going on now must have a huge impact on that.

DuBois: Yes, absolutely. Coronavirus has decimated the entire restaurant scene. But even before that, the question of course is how long it will take to recover, and what does it look like when it does recover? It is going to have to be very different, because there is already a massive transformation going on within the restaurant scene.

Again, the first time I came to China was in the early nineties. I was here as an English teacher for two years. At that point, you could go out for *chǎocài*, fried dishes, at little restaurants. Some really small ones would literally be a guy with an oil drum, a coal briquette inside, and a wok on top that would qualify as a restaurant. It might even qualify as a good restaurant if that guy knew what he was doing. That was the essence of dining. Then, in the late nineties, Western fast food really took off. There was one McDonald's in Beijing that everybody would make their pilgrimage to. By the late nineties, they were everywhere. They were nothing special. By the early 2000s, Chinese franchises were starting to take over. You can go online, and you can get a franchise restaurant, everything all set up, for something like 10,000 yuan at the really low end, which is incredibly cheap. Then you get all your food brought in packages, and you're just heating stuff up in microwaves a lot of the time.

Hulunbair, this place in northern inner Mongolia, is somewhere that I go very often, because I just love the place, and I have a lot of good friends there. But I can also see change there. The city of Hailar is not a big city. I was up there one time to deliver a talk on the ethnography of franchising. I was writing my talk and my PowerPoint, and I was in a mall kind of place, and I looked up and everything around me was franchises. I just started taking pictures of what was literally in front of my face, and these were going to become my PowerPoint. This is a place that produces, exports, and is known for beef. I was eating a plate of beef, and I went up to the counter and asked, “Where does your beef come from?” It comes from Anhui, and that is thousands of kilometers away. Why does it make sense for these franchises to import processed beef that you just heat up when it’s time for the consumer, to a place that is known for high-quality beef and is surrounded by the stuff. It’s like in Argentina, you eat meat for every meal. This is an interesting and very new phenomenon. It’s very symptomatic of the kind of change that is happening inside the dining sector. It’s becoming homogenized in a very particular way.

BD: I understand that before coronavirus hit, you were intending to undergo formal culinary training at one of Beijing’s restaurants?

DuBois: That is the idea.

BD: You are clearly interested in not just the study but also the preparation of food. Maybe you’ll have your own channel showing people how to cook rice.

DuBois: There is a lot of food porn in China. There are a number of these sites. What is the one in Japan? Cookpad.

BD: Cookpad, yes.

DuBois: There are a lot of these in China, and some of them are really good. The interaction with social media is just fascinating. There are a lot of people who cook food online. They post recipes online. Now everybody who has learned how to cook rice will take a picture and put it online. Jin Feng—her interview with Thomas David DuBois is also in this volume—who is based in the United States, has just written an outstanding book on the transformation. It’s an ethnography of foodways that comes up to the present day, and she identifies the new phenomenon that people will go out to restaurants not to eat the food. It’s not that conspicuous consumption—now it’s lifestyle consumption. You’re not there for the food, you’re there for the selfie. She explains it beautifully. If anybody gets a chance to read her book, I recommend it very highly.

Yes, I’m still hoping to undergo the formal culinary training. It’s part of a project that I’m doing on old businesses. There are over one thousand of these old businesses registered nationwide, and probably two-thirds are connected with food, such as restaurants, makers of sauces, that kind of thing. One thing I would like to do in addition to learning how to properly make these dishes—and really, the emphasis is on “properly”—is to meet the people who become chefs. This is connected to my interest in the human story of food. It goes back to the question of how I became interested in food as a research topic.

I remember very strongly that I was in Yunnan in Dali, doing research on this dairy industry and traditional dairy products. Doing what one does at an early stage of a project, just going out and finding everything, and coming back at the end of the day full of new knowledge and enthusiasm. I came back to my hotel one day, went online, and saw that the celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain had died. This is about two years ago. It’s strange, I’m not a person that follows celebrities, but this really hit me in a very personal way. Then you would look at how other people were talking about this, and they had the same reaction. Millions of people worldwide made a very personal connection with this man that they knew virtually, on TV.

It struck me that there’s something missing, being overlooked, in how we think about food. The anthropological perspective often talks about the relations of diners. How do the diners relate to each other? The business or political economy perspective is going to look at how that food gets to the plate. But there’s more that we can do on the human relations in how the food gets to the plate.

There are hundreds of thousands of chefs in China; it is a large group of people. They're trained industrially, and this is something going back to the 1980s, where you would have large-scale training of chefs. Very often it was supported by local tourism industries, particularly in places that are known for their food like Sichuan and need to get the human advertisement out as fast as possible. These people often lead very interesting peripatetic lives. Going way up to my old haunt in Hailar in northern Inner Mongolia, one of my favorite places to go is a Sichuan restaurant that is owned and run by a couple. The woman is from Harbin, the man from Xi'an. When you connect all these points on a map, you've got the northeast, northwest, and southwest, because we're cooking southwestern cuisine in the far northeast of China. Just how does that happen? What is the human story behind this kind of cultural travel?

Questions like how do we change the taste, how do we get ingredients, and what are diners expecting—these all go into it. One of the real attractions for studying cuisine formally is that I get to meet the other people who are studying cuisine formally. These are interesting people.

BD: What brought them there, what do they get out of it themselves, and so on.

DuBois: What's the next step, and who's paying your bills? Why study here and not there? There are a million questions that can go into it.

BD: As you were talking, I was thinking again about Anthony Bourdain. The feeling you were describing suggests to me parasocial relations in terms of celebrity, whereby you're relating to a person who is in the media in some way. You don't normally do it, but when some drastic event occurs that connects you to them in some way, you feel like there's almost a relationship going on between yourself and the celebrity, a sense of sorrow.

DuBois: You see how much response that kind of thing gets, and you realize how personal this relationship is for people worldwide. You describe it extremely well, because it really made me question, "Why am I feeling this? Why am I so upset by this?" Any suicide is going to be a tragedy, but this is somebody I've never met. Yet I feel like I've lost somebody very close to me. I think in many ways it is the medium of food that builds that bridge.

BD: You're living in Beijing now?

DuBois: Yes.

BD: What is life like at the moment for you, in this time of coronavirus? What has happened to you? How are you responding to it? What are your thoughts and feelings on where you're at?

DuBois: I'm grateful that you asked that question, Ben. It's something that I'm very eager to speak about. If you had asked me two weeks ago, I would have had the same answer to the first part, what am I doing? The answer is relatively little. That's the real, overwhelming feeling of being in quarantine, you get a bit of cabin fever. But one thing that has really struck me is of course our classes are canceled. I can go out of the house anytime I want, and that's always been the case, but I do have to have a mask on. At first, if I didn't have a mask on, I'd get dirty looks. Now I will have somebody official come up to me and say, "Put a mask on or go home." It's sensible in many ways. There is a potential that this does help, I hope, block the transmission of the virus, regardless of whether I have the right kind of mask or not. It may be helping a little, it may be helping a lot.

But more than anything else, what really strikes me is how much of a sense of social contract that engenders. If I go out without a mask, the response from other people will not be, "You're putting yourself at risk." The response will be, "You're putting other people at risk, and that's really irresponsible of you." I'm more concerned with the public response than I am with the official response, because it will happen immediately, and it won't be nice. Because you do feel a part of a society, and you have a responsibility to that society. For example, my university reacted very quickly, and this was either top-down nationally or at least all the universities in Beijing. They instituted an app, and we have to log in every day. Initially

to say we haven't been to Wuhan, now to say we haven't been anywhere, or where we've been. Are you feeling okay? Do you have a fever?

One day I didn't have my glasses on, and I pressed the wrong button. I said I had a fever, and I got five phone calls from different people in my school saying, "Okay, we're glad you're okay, but please don't do that again. Please be careful." I have never felt that the presence of what is happening is an oppressive presence. It is certainly an ever-present one. You see it everywhere. All that said, there's never been a run on toilet paper, there's never been a run on anything. You can still go outside and get all the fresh vegetables you want. You can get strawberries. Fresh meat is not available in most supermarkets, but frozen meat is. The disruption to daily life has in some ways been extreme and in some ways minimal.

To round it all off, as an American it really has become surreal to know that Chinese friends in China are concerned about their friends in the United States and are sending them medical supplies. I've had people asking about how to send things to the United States. It's not a small number of goods, and it's not a small amount of concern. That's hopefully something that my country is going to start taking care of in the future.

Related Texts

DuBois, Thomas David. 2017. *Empire and the Meaning of Religion in Northeast Asia: Manchuria 1900–1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

DuBois, Thomas David, and Jan Kiely, eds. 2019. *Fieldwork in Modern Chinese History: A Research Guide*. London: Routledge.

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Asian Journeys

Chinese Foodways

Jin Feng



Jin Feng is a professor of Chinese and Japanese, and the Orville and Mary Patterson Rount Professor of Literature at Grinnell College, Iowa. She has published on women in fiction, [missionary] education, nostalgia, the Chinese internet, and food.

The interviewer, Thomas David DuBois, is a board member of Asian Ethnology and is a professor of humanities at Beijing Normal University.

Thomas David DuBois: Let's begin with the obvious question: what brought you to the topic of foodways?

Jin Feng: I came to the topic of food for a combination of reasons. I grew up in China in Jiangnan area—the Jiangnan of my book title. Literally it means “south of the Yangtze River.” Historically, this is an area that's known for cultural heritage and material wealth. In my family, people value eating and cooking well. Actually, on my father's side, the men cook better than the women. My father trained my mother how to cook when they got married.

Another reason I'm interested in food is that my teaching experience at Grinnell College gradually led me to this research topic. I taught a first-year tutorial called “Some Chinese Food for Thought” in 2002. The first-year tutorial is a college-level training course for all first-year undergrad students at Grinnell. The instructor helps students learn how to write, read, and discuss at the college level. The topic itself was not that important. I just thought food was a relatable and accessible topic for students to engage in. That was my first trial at teaching food to undergrad students. Later on, I upgraded that to an upper-class seminar.



In 2017, I got a chance to team-teach at Grinnell with a Russian specialist, Todd Armstrong. We team-taught what's called the "Global Learning Tutorial," which was open to fifteen first-year students. We led those students to visit China for two weeks and Russia for another two weeks, in addition to the regular classroom teaching. That really opened my eyes to the experiential learning aspect of teaching and, of course, the importance of this sort of experience of food, in addition to regular academic research such as reading historical research and that sort of thing. Around 2013, I started to seriously consider research in food as a book project. That's how I came to the topic of food.

TDD: What did you do with the students in Russia and China? Because this is such a good way of writing a book.

Feng: The course itself was mainly divided into two parts. I did the first part on Chinese foodways, my colleague Todd Armstrong did the second part on Russian foodways, and of course we team-taught the course together. We introduced students to a variety of things related to foodways, not just literature or film, which I was trained in. We had students read historical and psychological sources, as well as literary sources. Of course, as first-year students, they did not necessarily have background knowledge on China or Russia.

It was also necessary to introduce a lot of other historical and cultural information to this group of curious first-years. Other than the classroom instruction, we also had experiential learning. We took students to China for two weeks, and we visited the Jiangnan area where I did most of my fieldwork and was most familiar with. We visited, for example, Nanjing, Shanghai, Suzhou, and Hangzhou. In Russia we also visited four cities. We started with St. Petersburg, and then Moscow, Irkutsk, and Vladivostok. We had a lot of meetings and visits to restaurants locally, and we also met with chefs, managers, and local people in order to really get a sense of the contemporary foodscape of both China and Russia.

Of course, China and Russia have something in common: they are post-socialist societies. We saw a lot of traces of history in the local foodways. Our students got a lot out of that as well. We also got to know the students very well, as far as you travel together, you live with them, they leave for two weeks, and then another two weeks. All of us instructors and students got a lot out of that experiential learning aspect. The students also asked very good questions, which opened my eyes to research on food.

TDD: What kind of questions? What was surprising to the students? What did they see that maybe is very familiar to you in a place like Jiangnan?

Feng: We tried to have a good combination of urban and rural experiences. Jiangnan area traditionally was wealthy, and people valued teaching. For some students who had never traveled abroad, this was really an eye-opening experience. Most of them were Americans, and we had a couple of international students in the mix as well. If they were only familiar with American foodways, then of course they found a lot of unfamiliar things on the table in China. They were very adventurous. They went out by themselves to a hot pot place, and they had pork brain, which I had never had before.

For some, this was very adventurous for them. They really felt the importance of food in Chinese life. Of course, not just the nourishing of the body. It was also aesthetic, cultural, and social. I thought that was a very good experience for them, because even though everyone eats, people have different ideas and beliefs about food. Food is a very good window into a culture. They learned a lot from that experience.

TDD: Let's talk a little bit about your book. In a relatively short book, you have managed to do an awful lot. You have a lot of themes: nostalgia, gender, class, taste. You weave these in together using a lot of different sources. You've got classical sources and modern ones, literary sources and ethnographic accounts, books and internet chat rooms. It sounds like they wouldn't integrate, but they do. You write them into a series of arguments that really speak to each other and show continuity over time. What really stands out for me is your personal experience with restaurants. Not just interviewing managers, but visiting as a diner, as a patron, and critiquing the food. That's quite unique. Could you tell us a little bit about how you did that?

Feng: Sure, I'm happy to talk about that. You mentioned that I wrote on a variety of topics. My earlier books prepared the way to my research on food. In terms of the internet postings I looked at, my book before the food book was on Internet literature (*Romancing the Internet*). In order to write that book, I actually took an anthropological course on how to conduct fieldwork. The title was "Ethnographic Methods in Complex Societies." I used that in order to gather materials, do interviews, and so forth. The book before that, *The Making of a Family Saga*, was really a history book. When I was researching for my food book, I thought I could use those methods again, with some changes in order to bring a full-bodied experience on food into this book.

I started with friends and family, because of course I grew up in the area. I knew people with connections to the restaurant industry, and some of them were food journalists. I started by interviewing them and asking for introductions. They were very helpful. Through them, it was a snowballing process. I got to know people I had not met before, especially in Hangzhou. I was not as familiar with Hangzhou as I am with Suzhou, which is my hometown. I got to meet with chefs and managers of restaurants and talk with them.

Since I also have friends in the area, both professional and personal, I also used them as interview subjects. I checked with them to see what they like to eat and what restaurants they recommend. Of course, if you talk about food with a Chinese person, they are always happy to open up. They always have something to recommend. It's the perfect icebreaker. They always express pride about their hometown's food. That's actually very useful. You see that in historical sources as well. There's a lot of hometown bragging about, "That specialty food is so good in my hometown. No one can compare to that."

I also eat a lot. I went out and tried to look at different restaurants in the area. There were high-end ones, but also local eateries that specialize in, say, steamed buns or soup noodles and so on. Speaking of the internet, Chinese people use a lot of WeChat and other platforms to exchange ideas and information. You can get quite a lot of information from that as well. They recommend restaurants. They also record their own experiences. From there, I also found out about some unique eateries to try. That was basically how I did my field work, but of course, all narratives are driven by sources. I can't say that I provide everything in my book, because you have to make a choice what to include and what not to. I tried to give people a real feel of contemporary China in the Jiangnan area.

TDD: Again, you were remarkably successful in doing that. Did you have a favorite restaurant or a particular experience that stands out?

Feng: I can't say what my favorite restaurant is. I did have a lot of good eating experiences. Not just the food itself, but the stories associated with the food I tried. The chefs and managers are happy to open up and tell me about their experiences with food. I also got some tips, not necessarily about how to cook but how to relate to the food. They were happy to talk about those technical details, and I thought that was very helpful as well.

TDD: Did you get a sense of how they felt about the consumer? If you talk about how to eat correctly, there's always the question of whether people are actually doing that.

Feng: A lot of the chefs and restaurant managers were trained in the profession, but they were also very clear about the contemporary consumer culture. They wanted it to be successful in the business sense as well. They really had to keep an eye on what their competitors are doing. They were trying to be different—but not that different, which would turn consumers away. It was important for them to utilize local cultural resources, to show consumers that they create authentic local food. So that consumers can go there and have a good experience, but also learn something about local cultural traditions and heritage. From my interviews, I got that sense very clearly.

TDD: You also emphasized a change in the consumer. You talk about it in terms of middle-class anxiety, that people aren't necessarily interested in the food, they're interested in the lifestyle experience. You go for the food, take a picture of it, and put it on your WeChat feed. That has to be pretty painful for a real gourmet to see.

Feng: Right, yes. There's also a generational thing going on. For the older generation, say my parents' generation, and maybe even my generation, we have memories of what food was like early on. The younger generation, millennials who were born in the eighties or nineties, do not necessarily have this memory. They maybe only heard about the food that their parents ate or saw things on film, TV, or social platforms. But they themselves did not have a real experience of food. They were fascinated by the stories associated with food. Some of the chefs I interviewed knew that. Some of them were offended, because they wanted to give these young people the real experience of food, but they may not have the knowledge or memory to really appreciate that. Some of them were quite philosophical, because we have to go with the times. If consumers want different things, we'll have to provide them with that.

Getting back to your question about middle-class identity, I thought that Elizabeth Currid-Halkett's book *The Sum of Small Things*, which was a study of contemporary American culture, also resonated with contemporary Chinese culture. She mentioned that now we have an aspirational class that is not a "leisure" class. These people are middle class or upper middle class by income bracket, and they really value inconspicuous discreet consumption rather than materialistic, conspicuous consumption. Some of the Chinese middle class are on the way to that, because they did want to distinguish themselves from the lower class. They wanted to show their social status and cultural knowledge. Consumption of food is a good way to do that. Starbucks is so popular in China. That's the Western lifestyle that they aspire to, but consumption of local food, especially local food with a story and cultural heritage behind it, is also a way to do that. You can see that very clearly as well.

TDD: You also deal very well with the marketing of this heritage. For example, the development of franchises and copycat-style businesses, which sounds like a very American phenomenon, that these are essentially becoming mass-reproducible cultural experiences. It sounds like a lot of things that we saw happening in the United States in the eighties and nineties have now hit China in force. Does it sound like something unique is happening in China, or is this just a global phenomenon that China is doing remarkably well at?

Feng: Globalization is really a force to be dealt with academically and culturally as well. In China, managers and chefs from the big restaurants I interviewed are very well aware of this phenomenon. Some of them really aspire to franchise. That's a way to scale up, make a profit, and cut costs. They did emphasize that they still value the quality of the food. They maybe have a centralized plant that can distribute their food stuff to different places, so that people have a uniform experience of the food.

This is now a market-oriented economy, I want to make a profit to make a living. A lot of restaurants are no longer state-owned and state-run, so they have to fend for themselves. In a way it is following the trend that has already happened in other countries, maybe in more developed countries in the West. There are also some people who still want to maintain their unique identity and keep it small. I don't know how successful they would be in the long run. Meanwhile, some of them try to hold onto that and maybe try to use new media to advertise their business by word of mouth.

TDD: You mentioned scarcity in a few places. There was one noodle restaurant that announced it was only going to make one hundred bowls of these noodles per day, and then suddenly we have a line of people out the door to get these noodles. It sounds like the market is there for authenticity, even if it's created authenticity.

Feng: The restaurant you mentioned was a small family restaurant, and the owner was also the chef. They tried innovative ways to market their business. Younger people nowadays are very tuned into new opportunities. When they saw something on social media, of course they crowded to that, trying to get a feel for the restaurant. Maybe some of them were not so interested in the food itself, it was a social thing.

TDD: I'd like to return to the topic of gender, because this was something that you did very successfully in the book. Would you mind saying a few words about how gender played into the foodways of Jiangnan?

Feng: Thank you for bringing that up. Actually, I thought I didn't emphasize the gender aspect enough, and I do have a follow-up or expansion of that topic in my new article. What struck me of course was in the restaurant industry, the chefs are men. If there are women, they work in a subsection of the industry, which is *bai'an* or snack-making. They make noodles, pastries, and things like that. When I talked with chefs, some of them were middle-aged or older people. They also said they did not want their daughters to become chefs, because it's such a challenging industry. In China, if you do a *hongan*, which is a main dish, you have to stir fry. Their idea is if you have to do that, it challenges you physically, and of course it's unpleasant stuff in a very hot and humid restaurant or kitchen. That's what I heard.

Interestingly, I also saw quite a few restaurant managers are women. They need a different way of approaching food, using cultural knowledge to talk about food instead of making food. In a way they get the upper hand in terms of power. In traditional Chinese society, chefs are looked down upon, because they are considered laborers, people who use their brawn instead of brain. Intellectuals have higher social status. That's a topic of my new article, about how Chinese women approach food and claim power from male elites.

TDD: This is an article on women restaurant managers?

Feng: That's right.

TDD: When might we see that?

Feng: We have a group of people working on a volume on Chinese food, which deals with the topic from different perspectives—the production, consumption, and history of food from different disciplines. I don't know when that will come out. We are working on it. I wrote the article, but I'm sure it will go through multiple rounds of revisions and so forth. I did have a lot of fun writing that article, as well as the book of course.

TDD: You mentioned "we." There's a good group of people right now doing food studies from many different perspectives. It's a booming field in Chinese studies and in all fields. There's a new creativity going into this, particularly in Chinese studies. Where do you see your work fitting into food studies? What do you think you have added? And where could or should the field as a whole go next?

Feng: A lot of people are doing outstanding work about Chinese food, which is very exciting. Chinese studies came to the topic of food a little later than other areas of study. Right now I see a lot of people research or write about Chinese food from different disciplinary backgrounds, and that is a very good thing, because there is a synergy going on. I really want to see people collaborate from their own disciplinary backgrounds and bring their own unique experiences to the study of Chinese food. You yourself may also have something to say about the collaboration between different disciplines when we all study food. Food is such a versatile tool for teaching, as well as research. You can have students really engage with food. Everybody can talk about it. They all have their own family and cultural backgrounds to contribute. It's very exciting. We can see various breakdowns between different fields and also probably between Asian studies and Asian American studies. I thought that was a very good way to go.

As to my contribution to the study of food, I don't know how unique it is, but my book really tries to focus on the present while bringing the past into the present. It's about nostalgia, but of course nostalgia happens in different historical periods, and now we have a new reality. You can see the traces and patterns, but we also have something different as of now. The changes and evolutions in the foodways in China really reflect the ways people live and think about different things more than food itself. I try to give people a real feel for the contemporary foodscape in China. Of course, it's only one area of China. It's not all China. China is a diverse place with many different culinary schools.

Related Texts

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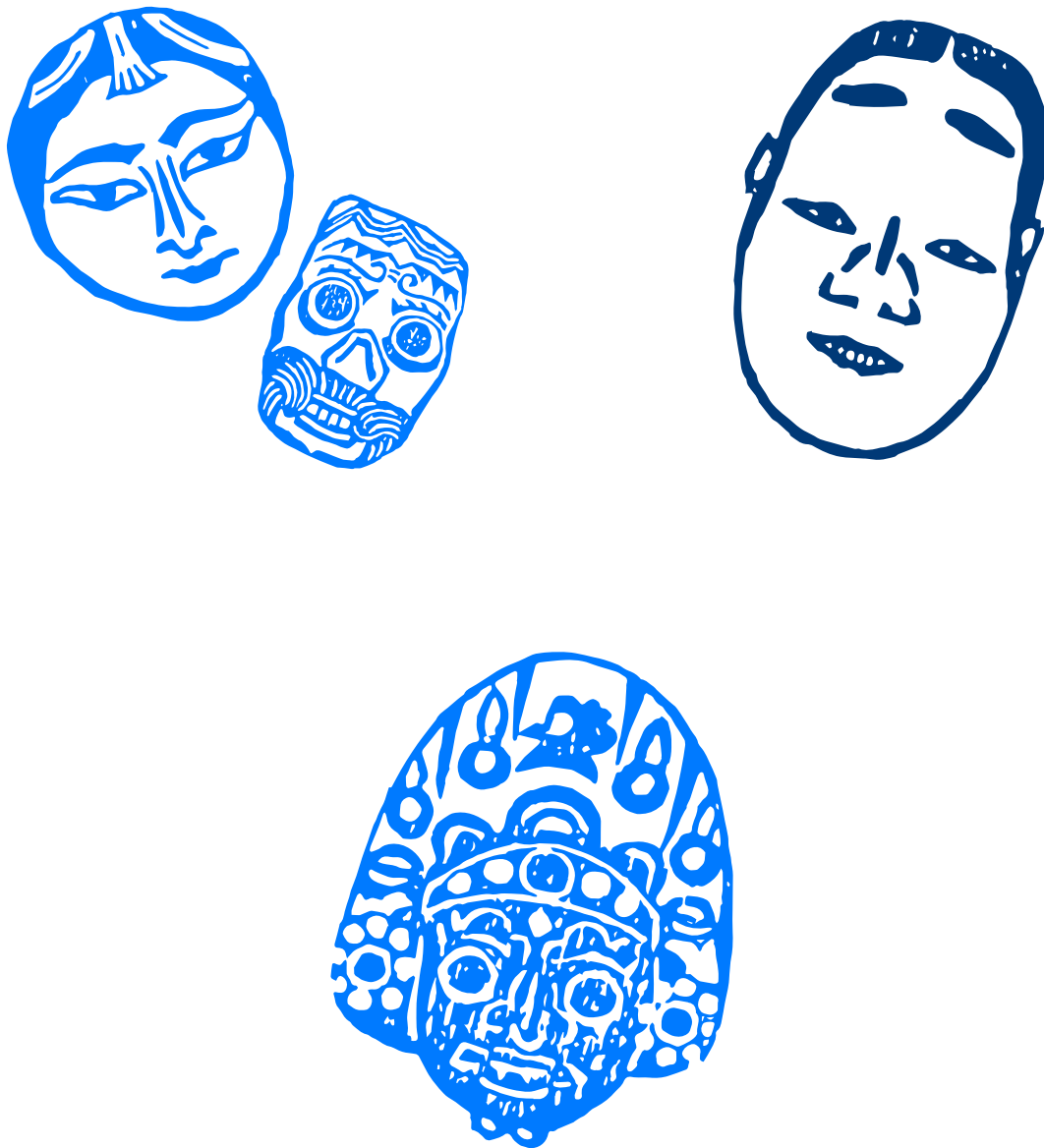
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Disability, Accessibility, and Covid-19 in Japan

Mark Bookman



Mark Bookman completed his doctoral dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania on the history of disability policy and related social movements in Japan. He was a postdoctoral fellow at Tokyo College, the University of Tokyo, at the time of his unexpected passing in December 2022.

Ben Dorman: What motivated you to pursue what you're studying in Japan?

Mark Bookman: The story starts around twelve years ago, when I came to Japan for the first time. At that point in time, I was still walking. I didn't really notice any barriers or any aspects of disability life at all in Japan, the first time I came. When I came for a second time, around eight years ago, I was in a manual wheelchair. I realized that the same bars and restaurants that I used to go to, if there was a single step up, I wasn't able to go to those places anymore. I started to become aware of some of the architectural barriers that were around me. Thankfully, I was still able to walk a little bit, so I was able to navigate those barriers with relative ease.

But when I came back to Japan for a third time, this is six years ago at this point, I was in an electric wheelchair, and I was no longer able to walk. Those same stores where there was one step, I might have been able to navigate it eight years ago, but that was not necessarily the case anymore. I became more reliant on a lot of community members to help me navigate those kinds of spaces. I was here on a Fulbright grant at that point in time, researching the history of Buddhist thought. To do that work, I had to go to a bunch of temples and shrines. I know you've probably spent a fair bit of time at temples yourself,



so you can imagine that there are stairs everywhere. For me, it became almost impossible to do the work that I wanted to do, because everywhere I went, I ran into these physical barriers.

In terms of my personal life, going out to restaurants and bars became very difficult. At some point the question for me was less, “What do Buddhists think? What is the history behind that,” and more, “Why can’t I get in the front door?”

As I reflected on my own experience, going back and forth to Japan, I thought, “What information is out there on disability in Japan, or access for that matter?” I started digging around and found there really wasn’t a lot of research in either language looking at the history of disability.

I decided to start my PhD working on the history of disability in Japan. Initially I was focusing on the intersection of religion and disability, transitioning from my earlier work on Buddhism. When I tried to explain to my friends what disability meant in the ninth century for a bunch of Buddhist monks focusing on pollution, they looked at me like I had two heads. They didn’t quite get it, mainly because there wasn’t a history of disability today. There were so few resources for them to look at in comparison that talking about esoteric ritual was not quite an easy entry point. When I realized that, I decided, “Okay, I’m going to write a core history of disability policy.” As I did more research into that field and traced it back over time, I realized the history of disability policy can be broken down into 150-year chunks, starting in the median period and going into the present. That’s what I have decided to write my dissertation about.

BD: What are the main points from your dissertation work that you can relate to us?

Bookman: One of the main points is that we can’t really understand things like industrialization, urbanization, or militarization without looking at disability. I’ll give you an example here. When Japan goes into World War II, and we have a massive spike in veterans, the government has to figure out what to do to provide these veterans with welfare. Or else it risks the conscription rates, people not signing up; it risks public support and things like that. The government doesn’t really have any significant experience in helping veterans at the start of World War II, simply because the body count up until that point had never been so high. To figure out what veterans need, it ended up turning to disability organizations as advisors to help it generate veterans’ welfare, which allowed Japan to make its way through the war. In that way, we can’t really understand Japan’s militarization and activities without looking at disability. But likewise, we can’t understand ideas about disability without looking at some of those same processes of militarization, industrialization, and so forth.

I’ll give another example here. After World War II, when Japan goes into the era of the economic miracle, when factories started popping up everywhere, we have things like industrial pollution. When you have cars, you have car accidents. When you have skyscrapers, you have stairs and people who can’t climb them. It’s because of Japan’s industrial boom that we have all these new kinds of barriers emerging and new kinds of impairments that lead to a change in definition of disability, legally and otherwise. These processes are interlinked—and they’re not just interlinked locally in Japan, they’re also a mixture of local and global developments.

For instance, I mentioned earlier that veterans were guided by a lot of disability organizations. One type of group in particular stands out. The groups for the blind were very heavily involved in veterans’ welfare. In fact, groups for the blind were the only group of impaired individuals directly involved in drafting Japan’s first disability welfare bill in 1949. If you think about why, a big part of it is that Helen Keller came over to Japan from the United States and got together with a lot of these local organizations to spread their influence. Disability policy in Japan has been linked to social processes, industrialization, and urbanization. We can think about it as being led by global disability movements and local uprisings. We can think about how, if disability is shaped by these processes and it shapes these processes, then it’s impossible to think about disability in Japan without thinking about disability in the United States. Likewise, it’s impossible to think about disability in the United States without observing disability in Japan.

BD: Can you discuss what’s going on with access in Japan today?

Bookman: The last twenty years have been extremely transformative in terms of access in Japan. A number of major laws were passed in 2000. The first being the barrier-free transportation law, which for the first time in Japan's history made access to transportation a legal requirement, at least for major public transportation. From that point on, it really became what I call, "You give a mouse a cookie, he wants a glass of milk." What I mean by that is, when you have disabled people who are able to ride the trains, they're then able to go further out into their communities. They're able to go to restaurants, movie theaters, and places that may have otherwise been inaccessible. As more people gain access to more parts of the community, there's more pressure. Certainly that pressure has also been magnified by things like Japan's aging population, who of course also have access needs.

It was there before in the nineties, but starting in 2000, because of the legal mandate, this process has been rapidly accelerating. The point here is simply to say, things have been moving at a rapid pace. As transportation has improved, so has access to shops and restaurants. Things like hotel rooms have gradually been increasing in terms of accessibility. But the reality is, things have been moving a bit too fast. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Right now, Japan's percentage of accessible hotel rooms nationwide is currently 0.4 percent. Ahead of the Olympics—or where the Olympics would have been this summer—the government had been trying to raise the percentage to 1 percent nationwide. But when you rush to get that amount of increased access, you're not necessarily taking into account the needs of everyone who might use those hotel rooms. If we build them all so the doors are, say, 70 inches, because that's what the standard should be, then someone with an 80-inch wheelchair might get left out.

If we're rushing to build, then we're not necessarily taking the time to ask that person what they need. If you think about it, twenty years is not a lot of time for transforming every aspect of our society in terms of access. But when we talk about the Olympics, we're talking about an even shorter amount of time. We're really talking about ten years. What I've seen has been rapid transformations in all sectors of society, but there have been some barriers because of how fast things have been changing.

BD: Last year, you appeared on a TEDx talk entitled "Paralympics as Possibility," and you're speaking about accessibility and various issues in that. How do you see the situation now that the Paralympics has been canceled, at least for this year?

Bookman: The possibility now is even greater than it ever has been. Let me explain what I mean by that. I mentioned earlier that we were rushing for the games and trying to get everything done ahead of time. Well, now we have an extra year. Not only to build, but we have that time to reflect on what's worked so far and what hasn't. I'd argue that the current crisis right now with Covid-19 is actually magnifying the successes and failures of what we've done so far. Everyone can see where access needs more work ahead of the games, and now we have the possibility of really changing it. Not just for the people who might come from abroad or locally to Tokyo for the games, but also for generations beyond that. Thinking about things like the Asian population, how they might benefit from the access building that we're doing now. The postponement of the games is actually the promotion of that possibility, if you will. It gives us an opportunity that we can't afford to miss.

BD: You've just published a very interesting article with our colleague Michael Peckitt in the *Japan Times* that appeared on March 30, titled "Facing the Covid-19 Crisis with a Disability." In that article, both of you have written some really pithy, important statements. One of them that struck me was something important you wrote relating to how Covid-19 has changed the way people with disabilities in Japan approach barriers. You also mentioned that people without disabilities are hopefully now able to better understand what it's like to be denied access to certain sections of society. This really struck me as a crucial point. I'd like to invite you to speak a little bit more about this article and your thoughts. Maybe some of the things that you and Michael discussed and perhaps didn't manage to get into print.

Bookman: One of the most important things to talk about when it comes to accessibility is that accessibility is not a matter of disability. People tend to equate the two, but the reality is everyone needs access to be able to live their lives. Whether it's someone with a wheelchair, a parent with a kid in a stroller, an

elderly person, or the person that you might imagine as being able-bodied. All of these people need to be able to get up, get on a train, go to work, go to school, go out to the movies, have fun, live their lives. For that to happen, there are so many supports that have to be in place.

For a person in a wheelchair, it could be around getting them out the front door of their apartment. For a so-called “able-bodied individual,” it could mean that they have to be able to get on the train. We tend to ignore the access needs of the standard able-bodied person, because we think of them as built-in or inherent. We think that everyone can get on the train, so why talk about that as an access issue? The reality is everyone does have these needs, and some people are just already privileged. Covid has highlighted some of that privilege and shown people who, from no fault of their own, often take advantage of the fact that the built environment does privilege them. It’s allowed them to see that privilege. People who used to be able to go on the train with no problem but now can’t are able to recognize what that experience is like. People who used to be able to go to school but now can’t, or used to be able to go to work but now can’t, come to think about what that does for their own lives.

Not just in those spheres, but also in unexpected, surprising ways that affect other parts of life. We can imagine someone who can’t go to school and therefore decides to go out and spend time and a bunch of money. They’re okay, but then therefore don’t have enough money to go out and buy groceries. Or we can imagine all of these sorts of different connections of how access to one place changes your life in so many other ways. Covid is this opportunity to reflect on who the environment privileges with access right now, and what we can do to make that privilege extend so that more people can use the environment—so that more people don’t have to experience some of the negative, unexpected effects of access that many people are going through right now.

BD: How is it personally affecting you and your situation where you are?

Bookman: For me personally, it’s had a fairly big impact. I’m just now finishing my dissertation and revisions on a bunch of articles. To get that work done, I need to be able to go to places like the National Diet Library or various research archives. I need to be able to meet with certain activists and talk with them, and I haven’t been able to go outside. I am immunocompromised, so I’m at particular risk from Covid, and not being able to go and access those articles and those archives has affected the way that I conduct my work. This in turn has affected the way that I conduct my activities toward employment, which in turn has affected the way that I live my everyday life.

It’s had a huge impact on what I do each day. The biggest area of impact for me has not been related to my person per se but the support networks around me. I use caregiving services pretty much 24/7, because I’m not able to really move my body by myself. As a result of that, I rely on a lot of people. But a lot of the caregivers who typically help me have small children of their own, who because of school closures are not able to get care. They have to stay home and watch their kids, which means that they’re not around to help me. Issues like that have come up time and again, where even if I stay at home, I’m still at risk, because of the way that Covid has affected all the care structures around me.

BD: How will this online world that we may be moving into affect people with disability?

Bookman: Well, there’s a long history here, and it’s a very contentious or argumentative history. Disabled people in Japan, as elsewhere, have been fighting for a long time for access to telework and education. For many, especially those who are in institutions or who cannot easily leave their home due to mobility issues, the ability to participate in a class or a workplace remotely has been a dream. It’s been a way of access to the outside world. It’s been a long fight. Usually, and I speak personally here, when you ask for remote access, a lot of the time there’s resistance. Whether it’s the expense of setting up the telecommunications, or it’s the complexity of it. Expense is a huge part of it. For example, if we’re talking about a classroom, how do you set up a telecommunication system that’s accessible for theoretically every student? Because it would have to be fair, right?

BD: Yes.

Bookman: From a lot of administrative angles, to be able to do that appears to be very cost intensive. I would argue it isn't, and Covid has shown us that it's actually a lot easier than most people have thought. But up until now, that has been a major barrier that a lot of people have run into. There's also the problem internally of the politics of telework. I mentioned earlier briefly that things have to be fair. Let's take the communication method. Right now we're talking into microphones. If I can't speak, then am I able to fully participate in this online world that we're taking part in now? Let's say I couldn't hear, or I couldn't see. Depending on my impairment, that could change the way that I access this world and what counts as appropriate or reasonable access. These are questions that have been asked and that have led to a lot of internal fighting within disabled communities. But also between disabled communities and administrators, who can use that logic of fighting to say, "Well, there's clearly not a good answer to this yet, so we're going to hold off until there is." There's been a lot of dragging in that way.

But again, Covid has really changed the playing field, in that telework and remote education have become almost the norm for a lot of the dominant or non-disabled population. That population has now created the environment where telework is necessary. As it's been implemented, we're going to see people recognizing that even though there are some initial fits and starts right now as we're trying to rush it into practice, once we've had a chance to get used to it, it's actually going to be a lot easier and more cost-efficient for a lot of people.

Hopefully, while we're developing it further, we can include the disabled people who have been fighting for it for so long. Because they've been fighting for it, they actually have more expertise than most able-bodied people. We can bring that in as a knowledge source to be able to develop a more efficient telecommunication or telework system that could push into the future. If your question is, what is the relationship between disability and telework, I would say it's been a long battle, it's one that's ongoing, but it has a bright future. As long as we recognize that the creation of telework right now and its implementation cannot include just the non-disabled workers. It should include a lot of the disabled experts who have been working on it for some time now, so as to make sure it's as inclusive as possible.

BD: You spoke about the word "fairness," and as you spoke I heard you put some silent double quote marks in there. Fairness is an interesting concept in the sense that the idea is treating everyone equally, but how do you treat everyone equally when we're dealing with people with different needs? By what means will the disabled community actually have their voices heard, or will it be up to other people, say the non-disabled community, to realize what's going on?

Bookman: This comes back to the TEDx talk that you mentioned earlier. In that TEDx talk, I brought up the idea of crowdsourcing as a possibility of the Paralympics. We have this opportunity to use the Olympics as a moment to crowdsource all the accessibility data we can find using mobile apps, social media, Facebook, Twitter. Get all this information about access from all the foreign visitors who are coming to Japan, so that Japan could learn from that and become more accessible locally. And then, how could those foreign visitors learn from the things that Japan is doing well, like in robots, and then take that information back to their own countries to facilitate a global access transformation.

Those same crowdsourcing methods, the same use of social media, is what's going to allow for calling attention to the diverse experiences of telework and sharing them with broader publics, so as to be able to collectively develop a more efficient system. To some extent, yes, it will be a matter of the non-disabled population paying attention to things like disabled Twitter as a way for people to magnify their voices beyond word of mouth or local communities, in a way that would then be able to be acted upon. Unfortunately, as is often the case, the onus is on the people affected and marginalized by a certain experience to vocalize their own experiences. It's an unfortunate reality, and it is one that we live. Disabled people are a starting point to vocalize on their experiences, if they have the resources to do so, but it doesn't mean it ends there either. It is then the responsibility—that's not the best term, but that's what I'm going to use—of the non-disabled to pick up on those conversations and act on them.

At the end of the day, if we want to have a better system of telework for instance, it should be one that's inclusive. Inclusivity is what allows us to deal with issues like change over time. If we build for the non-disabled person at the moment, that system is going to fall apart five years from now. But if we start by thinking about diversity at the very beginning, if we start by actively including these disabled voices, then we have a much better shot at developing a sustainable system, and frankly, one that's more economically productive. But that's another story.

BD: How do you see your work as being relevant to areas other than Japan?

Bookman: I saw the Olympics as this opportunity for international and transnational exchange, where international visitors to Japan would be able to pick up on the things that Japan is doing well and take them back to their countries, and Japan would be able to learn from all those international visitors to change its own access. My work calls attention to those flaws and how access can be built globally. The one thing that I haven't mentioned in that global exchange process is the importance of transnational accessibility.

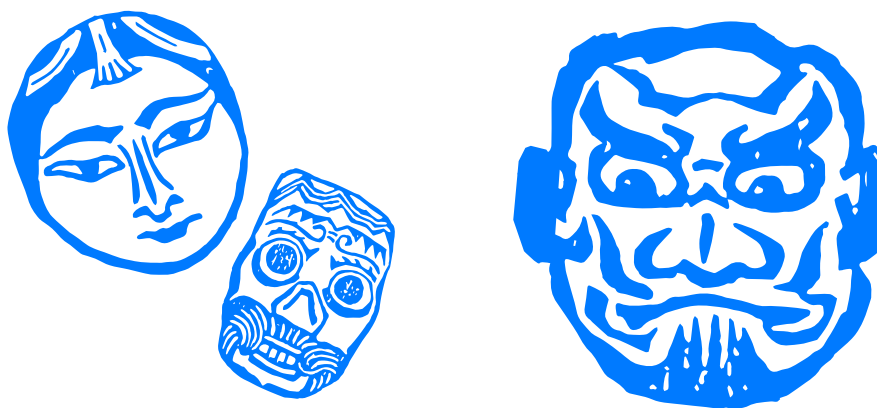
I'm a wheelchair user from the United States, and when I got to Japan, my wheelchair didn't fit into a lot of the wheelchair-accessible bathrooms because it's too big. You can build access at the international level and say, "Well, Japan has decided to borrow the standard from the United States." But even if it did that, there would be someone in a wheelchair from China or South Korea or Africa who would not be able to use the Japanese bathroom. One of the important conversations here is then thinking about not just what standard do we want to adopt, but how do we develop a flexible system where someone from any country can come in and use what Japan has to offer? By highlighting all of these access issues, whether it's transportation, education, or employment, Covid has shown how even within one country, there are all these different diversities.

There are people who if they can't get a mask, they can't go outside. Or there are people who if they can get outside, they can't necessarily get to the market. We should take this opportunity to think about how those processes work—not just at the country-wide level but at the international level. That's really what the ultimate legacy of Covid will be, the opportunity to think about how to make a society a global society, where anyone can easily access and use all spaces. To think about things like flexibility, customizability, how we can start with diversity instead of building it in as a retroactive adjustment. That's where we have to be right now. I'm hoping that Covid is the impetus for us to start thinking through some of those issues.

Related Texts

Bookman, Mark. "Paralympics as Possibility." Filmed March 17, 2019. TEDx video, 13:52.

Bookman, Mark, and Michael Gillan Peckitt. "Facing the COVID-19 Crisis in Japan with a Disability." *Japan Times*. March 30, 2020.



Reframing Disability in Manga

Yoshiko Okuyama



Yoshiko Okuyama is a professor in the Department of Languages at the University of Hawai'i, Hilo. Her areas of specialization include disability studies, Japanese mythology, media studies, and second language acquisition. She discusses her book, Reframing Disability in Manga. She was interviewed by Mark Bookman as part of the Nanzan University Anthropological Institute's "Disability and Japan in the Digital Age" project.

Mark Bookman: How did you come to write *Reframing Disability in Manga*?

Yoshiko Okuyama: In 2015 I was teaching a course on manga and a colleague mentioned an interesting book called *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. That year, I came across a newspaper article that featured the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. I learned about that history, and I was very interested in disability studies, and deaf studies in particular. Jolyon Thomas's *Drawing on Tradition* featured manga, and I thought that the University of Hawai'i Press did a great job with that. I wrote a book proposal and began fieldwork in 2017.

MB: Does the book focus on deaf populations, or are there other disabled populations that you are looking at?

Okuyama: The book features five areas of disabilities, and one of them is deafness. The other ones are paraplegia, blindness, autism, and gender identity disorder, more commonly termed gender dysphoria. One of the reasons I chose those areas was because of the number and quality of manga titles available



on those particular disabilities. For example, there are a lot of manga that feature deaf characters and deaf communities in Japan. I was personally interested in stammering, but I was able to find only one manga on that, so I removed that category from my plan. Another reason is my own familiarity with research on particular disabilities. That doesn't mean I was well versed in all five areas, but to some extent I knew something about them, especially deafness.

MB: I suspect that as you were going along, you developed a lot more familiarity with some of these other conditions that you were looking at,

Okuyama: Yes, especially the last category. I wasn't really well read in that area, and colleagues helped me find great books I could consult.

MB: Why did you focus on manga, as opposed to anime or some other medium where there may have been a different balance of materials?

Okuyama: My first book was on Japanese film, which included anime, so I decided that was out. As I mentioned before, I teach a course on manga, "Gender and Minorities in Manga," which I've been teaching since 2009. I had some materials about manga, and I was very familiar with contemporary manga titles. Just between you and me, I wanted to be a manga artist when I was young. I remember telling my high school homeroom teacher that my career goal is to become a *mangaka*. His reaction was, "you can't be serious, you can't make a living as an artist." So that kind of crushed my dream, but I continued to draw. When I was a college freshman I took my first work, which was incomplete, to a Japanese manga publisher. I think that was Kōdansha. But it didn't pan out, so I am a college professor instead of a manga artist.

MB: Why did you gravitate toward the particular manga that you look at in your book?

Okuyama: I had a particular section in my book about the selection of the manga titles. I chose manga that featured change agents. A change agent is like a force to revolutionize or alter the common perception of disability in Japan. Manga titles that feature people with disabilities as villains, sidekicks, or with some questionable characteristics were not included. The polar opposite of that is the "super crip." For example, if there is a blind person who is a lawyer in the daytime and an ass-kicking superhero at night, I would not consider that. I selected manga based on four criteria, and these were as follows: first, a character with a disability must be either the protagonist or the main supporting character featured in the manga; second, I excluded certain types of disabilities, because their manga stories are extremely limited; third, the main character with the disability could not be portrayed as a super crip, a physically disabled superhero; fourth, the story must intend to be informative about the disability in question and provide or at least strive to provide a description with the highest accuracy.

MB: The idea of an accurate portrayal of disability changes over time, right? I imagine all these manga were created at particular historical moments with their own politics and their own backgrounds. Did that factor into your decision making at all in terms of when these manga were produced, and how portrayals might have changed over time?

Okuyama: Yes. I particularly focused on manga that were recently published, manga published since at least in 2000.

MB: So, it's material that came out after a lot of the early accessibility policies in Japan that made drastic changes in terms of what representation was like in the early 2000s.

Okuyama: Exactly. That's actually a very important point. When I conducted interviews with authors, the editors of the publishing companies attended the interviews. I learned from the editors of the publishing companies that they emphasize sensitivity toward disability communities. Not only disability communities but minority communities in general. They often bring in specialists in those areas for awareness on issues such as discriminatory language, the description of characters, and so forth. They are really improving their own consciousness about disability issues.

MB: These are manga that were produced, to some extent anyway, with input from people with disabilities themselves, and with experts in the disabilities sphere at least informing the kinds of representations.

Okuyama: Yes. I cannot speak for every manga artist whose works featured in the book, because I did not interview all of them. But I know that one artist definitely worked with deaf communities in his local area.

MB: What do you view as the primary contributions of this work for scholars who might be working in gender or disability studies?

Okuyama: For scholars on gender, the last chapter of my book, which is on gender identity disorder, presents a unique perspective on this condition. In the United States, it is not considered to be a disability in general, but in Japan the situation is very different, and in order to receive some form of accommodation, you have to have the medical diagnosis. I believe it's good for the LGBT communities all over the world to be informed of that particular social and cultural situation in Japan.

For scholars in manga studies, there are a lot of books published by manga studies scholars, but mostly in Japan and in Japanese. We need more books that analyze manga written in English for English-language readers. One of the reasons is many of my American students are familiar with manga, and they actually grow up reading manga. It's a world phenomenon, and naturally we should have a lot of books on manga studies written in English.

For disability scholars, I'm really hoping that this work will make some contribution, because when I was selected to participate in the 2018 NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities) Summer Institute, the theme was "Global Histories of Disability." In that program, I met world-level scholars in disability studies. I really admire them and have been inspired by their work. I want to join their community, I want to be one of them. I hope that this is one way of putting my foot into that field.

Related Texts

Okuyama, Yoshiko. 2021. *Reframing Disability in Manga*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Schmiesing, Ann. 2014. *Disability, Deformity, and Disease in the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. 2012. *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.



What Happens When Fieldwork Fails?

Andreas Riessland



Andreas Riessland is an associate professor in the German Department at Nanzan University in Nagoya. His research interests are in advertising and propaganda, nationalism, aesthetics, and youth culture.

Ben Dorman: What initially brought you to the study of Japan?

Andreas Riessland: The study of Japan came from me being a bit lazy. I entered university in Germany having no clear idea of what I was going to do. I fiddled around and pretty much messed up that first year. Then, I thought, "Okay. I need a clear start." For some reason, I fell into studying Japanese and Japanese culture. I had a very good teacher at that time. She kept me going. After a while, I realized, "Well, if I really want to study it, I better do this in the country." I came over to Japan to study here. I went back to Germany and got my degree. By that time I had been offered a job in Japan, and I came and started that job, and also at the same time continued my research.

BD: Tell us about *bōsōzoku* (motorcycle gangs) and your interest in these groups.

Riessland: The interesting thing for me about the *bōsōzoku* is that everybody in Japan knows about *bōsōzoku*. They have been a very visual and also audible phenomenon in Japan for close to fifty years. We could go back to the 1960s when it really started, and there are still several thousand *bōsōzoku* around, so we can say this is the longest-lived youth movement in Japan. But when you look at materials about *bōsōzoku*, there's hardly anything written about it. There are some journalistic works, there are works in



criminology, but to my knowledge, there is only one really well-funded publication that looks at the anthropology of *bōsōzoku*. That started my interest about who these people are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it.

BD: The publications you mention are just in Japanese, and there's nothing in English?

Riessland: There are a few publications in English. One book has a rather racy title in English, *Kamikaze Biker*. It's a translation of the Japanese original, *Bōsōzoku no esunogurafī*, which is a more appropriate title. It's a very solid piece of work. It was by an anthropologist who did an in-depth study for more than a year with a *bōsōzoku* group in Kyoto. But that is pretty much it. For the last thirty-five years, there hasn't been much in the academic field about *bōsōzoku*. Regardless of the fact that if we look at the numbers of *bōsōzoku*, if we extrapolate the numbers from the statistics that the police keep, we can say that the number of *bōsōzoku* and ex-*bōsōzoku* must be in the seven digits. A considerable part of Japan's male youth in particular was *bōsōzoku* at some point in time or other.

BD: When I first came to Japan, *bōsōzoku* appeared to be disappearing. But I wonder what happened to the culture? These people are marginalized, as far as I know.

Riessland: Marginalized, yes, but it depends on what part of society you look at. If we look at white-collar society, they're very much marginalized, but if you look at the blue-collar parts of Japanese society, there they are not exactly acceptable but much more tolerated. Your neighbors next door, the Tanakas, if their son is a *bōsōzoku*, you feel sorry for Mrs. Tanaka. But as we all know, he will grow out of it, and boys will be boys. They're not being ostracized within that circle, whereas in white-collar Japan *bōsōzoku* are not really thought about much.

BD: Do the *bōsōzoku* have certain types of rituals to enter the groups?

Riessland: Yes, there are rituals. It's very ritualized. This is part of what really interests me about it. It's a sort of protest. Perhaps "protest" is not really the right term. It's a sort of claiming public space. What they do is a very efficient way of claiming space. By doing that, they make a very clear statement to society, "We're here, and you better come to terms with it." They are in a way going against mainstream society. But when you look at their own organizations, it's very structured. There's a very strict hierarchy within the organization, where they pretty much reciprocate the pattern that they go against. This is part of what I find fascinating.

Another fascinating part is that I am a staunch enemy of the only-in-Japan ideology. But strangely enough, with the *bōsōzoku* we can say here it is true. *Bōsōzoku* exist and existed only in Japan. Even in neighboring countries, there were some people who started something similar, but it never really caught on. In Japan, *bōsōzoku* were big and are still around to some degree. They are a rather unique phenomenon. Another interesting part with the *bōsōzoku* is that there are a lot of rituals. One of them is the leaving ritual. At age twenty or twenty-one, in most cases you get out of the *bōsōzoku* organization and you retire. They have official retirement rituals. Usually, just a bunch of flowers, and that's it.

There are also female *bōsōzoku* groups and organizations, called *redisu*. The response by the *bōsōzoku* groups is very biased. You have some male *bōsōzoku* groups who approve of them. You have organizations who have affiliated women's groups. Other *bōsōzoku* are staunchly against them and are quite aggressive toward women's *bōsōzoku* groups. It's a bit of a biased reaction on the side of the men.

BD: I started today with your recent publications on *bōsōzoku*. But we're also going to be talking about the anthropology of failure. Usually when people come publishing in the journal, or maybe on the podcast, they're talking about a book or something that's finished and is a success. Today we're talking about the other way around, what happens, and how one recovers in such circumstances. This is a grey area, because we don't really talk about it so much.

Riessland: Yes, indeed. I suggested this talk exactly as you outlined, because most of the research is, understandably, very much focused on success. This is what you want to produce, and this is what you

want to publish. In particular for younger researchers, that is a bit of an intimidating factor if they encounter difficulties and problems—I know this myself, and from some other people that I talked to. If this happens to you in your field, then you are somewhat left with the feeling that you're the only one who's incapable of handling their field, while everybody else is successful. It is necessary to also talk about the flip side of when things go awry, when things are not working out. This is a perfectly normal process, and the realization of failure, that it doesn't work this way, is also a research outcome. To say that, "I've tried it this way, and at least I can say that this way doesn't work."

I want to talk about my own experience, which is a somewhat traumatic experience. It just completely threw my research off track, and it was rather interesting research. First, I want to give a little bit of an outline of what I was doing there. This will be a bit of a longer talk. It goes back quite a while, when I was interested in Shugendō, not so much as a religion but more Shugendō as a social playing field. I was interested in who the people are: who are the *shugenja*, who are the people who sign up for Shugendō rituals, who follow Shugendō rituals, and who would describe themselves as *yamabushi* or the followers of Shugendō?

When I was still studying at university, I came across two or three books on Shugendō. Again, this is a topic that relatively little has been written about. I got interested and started looking into it a little bit deeper. I saw that *yamabushi* pop up more or less all over Japanese history. Historically speaking, *yamabushi* were immensely important within Japan, a sort of itinerant spiritual service industry you might say, going around the countryside and fulfilling all sorts of spiritual tasks that people had need for: clairvoyance, harnessing demons, exorcising places. Whatever was needed, they would supply that for a certain fee. You can find *yamabushi* throughout Japanese culture. You can find them in *noh*, *kabuki*, poetry, novels. The knowledge about Shugendō has more or less completely disappeared within everyday Japan as we know it now, but the *yamabushi* are still around. Not many—it's a marginal group.

That got me interested, and I wanted to know who are these people who, in this day and age, describe themselves as *yamabushi*, what are they doing, and why are they doing it? I found that you have more or less two big clusters of *yamabushi* culture. One is on the Kii peninsula, and that has a lot to do with Buddhist organizations around the Kyoto area. Then there is an area in northern Japan in Yamagata-Ken, on the Shōnai side. On the Japan seaside around the Dewasanzan, around Mount Gassan, Haguro-san, and Yudono-san, there's a big center, and this center is quite active. While I was in Japan, this center advertised in one of the Japanese newspapers for so-called *yamabushi taiken*. You could go up there, and for forty-eight hours you could get a taste of *yamabushi* culture and what it means to be a *yamabushi*.

Of course, I was intrigued. I signed up for it, went up there, and together with forty other foreigners—this was clearly geared toward foreigners—went on this forty-eight-hour experience. I met this *sendatsu*, the guide who took us around. He saw that I was interested in it. He was very supportive. Through him, I got more involved in what was going on there and found out that, in particular, this Haguro-Shugendō environment is very interesting, because it's rather unique. You have a ritual setup that is done by two groups of *yamabushi*, one of them Shinto affiliated and the other one Buddhist affiliated. I thought it was quite intriguing that you have two completely different groups, one Shinto, one Buddhist, doing pretty much the same thing. I started looking into it, and I found that the whole history of Haguro Shugendō is immensely interesting, how it came to be that this situation developed where you have these two "competing" groups.

It goes back to the end of the Sengoku Jidai period, when the Tokugawa Shogun had started. *Yamabushi* were seen as somewhat critical factors within the Tokugawa societal structure. These were the imponderables. They would travel freely. They were not controllable, so they needed to be controlled. It was decreed that all these Shugendō organizations had to affiliate with Mikkyō Buddhism, either with Tendai or Shingon. Pretty much all the organizations in Japan did, except for Haguro. Rumor has it that it was due to the mother of Tokugawa Iyasu, who had some connection to the temples and shrines up there. Due to her intervention, the Haguro Shugendō organization could go on as it had before. That was pretty much the only independent organization throughout the Edo Jidai.

But then, the new Meiji government put a stop to it and said, "Okay. With the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, they have to make up their minds what they are, or they will be Shinto now." They said, "All right, we're Shinto then." They pretty much continued the way they had before until Tokyo wisened up to it. They sent up a real hardcore Shinto government official who cleaned out the place. Of the close to 160 religious institutions there, when he left three years later, half of them were Shinto, three were Buddhist, and the rest were destroyed. He really cleared the place out. The ones who affiliated with Buddhism had a very marginal existence at that time, whereas the Shinto organization was now calling the shots.

With the 1945 decree of religious freedom, the Buddhist organization came back, and it reorganized as the true Shugendō organization—it called itself the true organization. There was a bit of competition between the Shinto and Buddhist organizations. Again, it's a very interesting point about who has the authenticity. The Buddhist organization said, "We have the liturgy. We have the spiritual inheritance, so we are the true Shugendō." Whereas the Shinto organization said, "We have the locations. We have the place where it all happens. We are the real McCoy."

What happened then was that these two organizations independently restarted their rituals. The Akinomine is a ritual retreat to a location on the mountain, where you undergo rituals. Before it was seventy-five days, at times even longer than that. Now it is down to about nine days. Within this nine-day ceremonial retreat, you spend times of prayer at the temple or the shrine and times of walking over the mountains. Of course, these two groups would access the same locations more or less at the same time and came to blows up on the mountains. Both organizations realized that this won't do, so then they came to a peaceful arrangement, that the Buddhist group would start their nine-day retreat one day before the Shinto group. Everything now is a bit delayed, and they don't run into each other in the mountains, and that doesn't cause problems.

This really intrigued me, that you have two competing groups doing the same thing. My contacts at the time were with the Shinto side, because the *sendatsu* who had introduced me to everything was on the Shinto side. I told him that I would like to attend the Akinomine, this nine-day retreat. He said that I should rather do it with the Buddhists. Through him, I got in touch with the local Buddhist priest, applied, and was accepted to attend. I went up there and underwent the nine-day retreat. This is when matters became interesting, because in my perception, this retreat was going to remove us from the world as it is, remove us into this liminal space, where we would undergo an extended ritual process of first death and then rebirth, and all this more or less in seclusion.

Most of it went along with my expectations, but then every now and then it deviated. At some point, we had a get-together, where we went through our prayers. Afterward, the Dai Sendatsu, which is the Buddhist priest of Tōgemura, said, "Oh, and there will be an announcement." One of the other semi-officials came up and told us about the situation and about the difficulties that were happening right there—I'll get into detail in a minute. To give us a better understanding, we would now go out. Whoever was interested could come along, and he would show us what exactly it is.

There was this sudden interruption in this ritualistic setup for a rather mundane matter. I was a bit, not exactly taken aback, but it surprised me. It's like, "How does this work? How can we within this very important setup suddenly have this mundane point coming in and stopping us in our tracks?" I asked them about this. I talked with the Dai Sendatsu and other officials, and they said, "No, that's perfectly alright." The Dai Sendatsu's philosophy was, "We have our rituals that you're expected to adhere to, but I leave it up to people on how they really handle it." It's up to the individual how they handle it, which I found quite impressive. There was a lot of leniency, which at first I hadn't been aware of. It was interesting to see how my expectations of what was going to happen there were suddenly undermined, and it's like, "Well, maybe you should throw your expectations of what this is going to be overboard and just be more open to it."

Now I want to talk about the failure point, because what they had been telling us at this interruption was that the Shinto organization conjoint with the Kenchō were planning to rebuild the road going up the hill to the main place, which is the Ideha-jinja now. They wanted to widen the road so that buses

can go up there, and they strategically wanted to bring the road closer to the mountain temple called Kōtakuji, where the Buddhists have their retreat—and in doing so, making the Buddhist retreat an impossibility. Several members of the Buddhist group started the Kōtakuji o Mamoru Kai or Organization to Protect Kōtakuji to make sure that this will not happen. Many of the participants in our Akinomine were members of that organization. Of course, me being a foreign academic, they were quite keen to get me in as a member. That already broke through the anthropological detachment that I was trying to keep. I was not a participant observer anymore. They asked me to become an active participant and to get involved in the politics. That was one point I saw as potentially difficult.

But another point was that, until then, my contacts and all the support I had gotten came through the Shinto area. To get more of an impression of the dynamics, we have to look at the *shugenja* and *yamabushi* of these two organizations. The Shinto *shugenja* are mainly based locally. Many of them run so-called *shukubō*, rest houses, in the village at the foot of Mount Haguro, but they are ordained priests (if we can call them that). They have their communities throughout Japan. If pilgrims come from that community, they would stay at that *shukubō* and this *sendatsu*, and this *yamabushi* would then take them up to the mountain. Many of the households in the village are within this system. The Shinto Shugendō organization has very strong roots throughout the village and some surrounding areas.

Whereas for a long time the Buddhist organization had been relatively small. If you look at the photographs of Akinomine in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, they had maybe twenty participants. But this had mushroomed with the “new age boom” in Japan. When I applied, I was admitted as one of a hundred who were permitted to go along. These hundred were picked out of several hundred applicants. Hardly any of these people are based locally. They come from all over the country. This creates a bit of a tricky situation, because the most hot-headed members, the firebrands of the Buddhist organization, are not local. They come in, and they have the conviction that what they are doing here is defending the true spirit of Shugendō. They can get quite abrasive.

One of the central ceremonies is the Saito Goma fire ritual. On the Buddhist side, this is a secret ceremony. It's done in the middle of the forest at a secret space, and no outside visitors are permitted. The Saito Goma of the Jinja is done a day later, right in front of Ideha-jinja, with more than a thousand spectators and local TV stations there, which of course in the minds of the Buddhist hotheads is not the real thing. They go there and they catcall. They're yelling in from the outside, “That's not the real thing. That's crap.” They're quite confrontational. Of course, what it means for them is once this is over, they leave. They go back to wherever they come from, and they don't have to face the consequences of their actions.

This is where now the Dai Sendatsu or local priest comes in, because all this is happening under his tutelage, and he's not very keen. It happens, and these people are confrontational to some degree, but at the same time, they have a point. It's obvious that the Shinto organization is much more business savvy. They are quite good at marketing this Shugendō issue as a tourism attraction. They have no qualms about offering all sorts of arrangements like these *yamabushi taiken*, which is seen by the more strict followers as a sell-out of Shugendō spirit.

On the one hand, you have the Jinja side, which is very well-rooted locally and supplies a lot of income to a lot of local households. It is doing something that profits people not only monetarily, but it also creates nation-wide attention for Yamagata and the Dewasanzan area. People have a vested interest in getting the message out. At the same time, on the flip side, you have the other people and the other organization that doesn't want to do this. I am not sure how much the plan really was to push the Buddhist side out of business. But this was definitely the take that the Buddhist side had, “The Shinto side is trying to push us out of here, and we're not taking this hands down. We're getting up. We'll do it.” They wanted me on board, but at the same time, I knew that if I joined the Kōtakuji o Mamoru Kai, this would be a very clear insult to the Shinto people who had helped me up to that point.

BD: At what point did you realize that you were involved in this conflict, and it was about to turn into a failure in terms of research? Was that the point where they actually specifically asked you to get on board on their side?

Riessland: Yes. When I was asked whether I would join the Kōtakuji o Mamoru Kai, that is the point when I started thinking and realized I couldn't do it. At the same time, I had spent several days and nights with these people in a close environment, with very close contact. There was a strong personal relationship with these people. I felt that if I don't join them, I'm letting them down. If I do join them, I'm letting the other side down.

BD: Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Riessland: Exactly. For me, the only option I had at that point was to say, "Okay, I'm just stopping this." Because I don't want to piss off one side or the other, and this is reaching a point where I have to make a decision, where I have to take sides, and where I have to get politically involved in what is going on there, but this is not what I wanted to do. I thought, "Once this is over, I'm getting out of it," which was a pity.

Years later, I went back and talked with people about it. Interestingly enough, they said, "Well, you not joining wouldn't have been a big issue." At the time, it didn't feel like this to me. Whether it was a big issue or not, I'm still in a position to say, "But for me personally, it was enough of an issue to stymie my plans and say, 'Okay. I'm getting out.'"

BD: Intuitively, you felt this is not the right way to go.

Riessland: Yes. The question is, how do you come to terms with it? It was clear that my research into Shugendō, what I really wanted to do—finding out who the people are, why they are going along, what their motivations are, and so on—was not going anywhere. Because if I continued the contact with these people, I would have to take sides. If I aligned myself with the Buddhists, I would cut off everything on the Shinto side. If I aligned myself with the Shinto side, I would cut off everything on the Buddhist side. I didn't want to do either. That was a real catch, where the only way out was to say, "In that case, I'm not aligning with any side."

It was a big disappointment, because it was a very worthwhile experience. Most definitely. Personally, I took a lot away from there, but the academic output was definitely not what I had hoped for. Afterward I sat down and started thinking, "What just happened?" I then published something about, "What do you do when it doesn't work?" In a nutshell, the message I want to bring is that failure or getting in a position where you can't continue might happen at any time, and it might happen to anybody. It did happen to many, many people. We owe it to ourselves to be honest about it. To just admit it and be able to say, "Yes, there was a project that I had great hopes for, and it didn't work. It fell to pieces." Every now and then, maybe at a conference, to have the guts to say, "I did this, and it didn't work."

BD: From what you're saying, it's not a result of anything that you did yourself but really the social and political circumstances of the time. For someone to say to you, "Well, it wouldn't have been a problem for you to join that side," that's obviously not your position and how you felt at the time.

Riessland: Yes. This is another important point, that the failure was not due to me creating this failure or being responsible. The reason for this failure was that the circumstances just didn't allow success. This is also something that we have to be aware of. There have been discussions going on since the 1970s: How far do you allow yourself to get involved in the field? How much do you have to stay out of it just to be the observer who does not influence the field beyond the utmost necessity? Or where do you think you now have the moral obligation to step in and defend your people, or whatever the situation may be? This situation has been going on for a long time, and there are still conflicting opinions upon this. People saying, "No. You should never get involved, whatever the outcome is." Others are like, "No. If you see injustice, of course, you have to get involved." It's a case-by-case decision, but at the same time, as in my situation, there may be cases where you can't do anything. What you have to do is get out.

In a nutshell, the most important message from this long and rambling story is, particularly as a young researcher, if you go out on one of your first research projects and you're in the field, you work hard, you get your data together, and then suddenly you get to this point where you can't go on, it's no reason for despair. It's not necessarily your fault. Of course, you can goof up, but it doesn't have to be your own

fault. It could be circumstances that just mess things up. The best thing to do is just turn to people that you can talk to about this and say, "I'm stuck. It seems like where I'm going is a dead end. I can't go on." Be open about it. Be open with yourself. Be open with other people about it. It's not the end. That's it.

Related texts

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