

Trajectories and Cohorts in Japan Anthropology

Chair: Lola Martinez (SOAS) & William W. Kelly (Yale)

The formal anthropological study of Japan dates from a few studies in the 1930 but it really began to develop as a scholarly field in the decade after World War II. In the past six decades there have been over 400 doctoral dissertations on Japan topics in sociocultural anthropology world-wide, and it has had a continuing influence on the wider discipline.

Japan may not have been a conventional site for anthropological field research, but for that very reason, it has been in the discipline's vanguard of new topics and methods. Before many of our colleagues who have worked elsewhere, anthropologists of Japan have had to learn to do research on, and theorise about, modernisation, urban forms, corporate enterprise structures, classroom education and apprenticeship learning, plural medical systems, secularisation and new religious fundamentalism, mass media, mass culture, advertising, and globalization. Moreover, even the earliest anthropologists of Japan understood that historical context matters, that 'native' scholars and other locals might well read and respond to our work, and that well-grounded fieldwork can involve lengthy and continuous return visits to the same sites. In short, our 'expertise' has long included a sense that our knowledge and theorising are perspectival and contingent. What does this mean for anthropology in general and for our own understanding of the anthropology of Japan itself?

Some of these issues have been addressed in writings by ourselves and other colleagues and at meetings, including earlier JAWS gatherings. Our specific ambition in this roundtable is to ponder the differences that what we might call 'entry cohort' may make in shaping and tempering our research interests, our perspectives on Japan anthropology, and its relation to the broader discipline. How do the conditions at the time of professional entry shape the course of a career and the direction of a field?

This question has led us to compose a panel of Japan anthropologists whose point of career beginnings span four decades. The panel will be co-chaired by Bill Kelly (Yale), who began fieldwork in the 1970s, and Lola Martinez (SOAS), whose first fieldwork was in the 1980s. We will be joined by two of our students who began field research in the 1990s, Dixon Wong (CUHK) and Karen Nakamura (Yale), and two of our students who have begun their research careers in the past ten years, Gavin Whitelaw (ICU) and Emma Cook (SOAS). Both sociocultural anthropology and Japan anthropology itself changed much over those four decades, and we are led to wonder the differences that this has made to anthropologists entering the field. There are many motivations for research interests, topical priorities, and theoretical agendas. Here we wish to assess the contributions that conditions of entry cohort may have made to the historical trajectory of Japan anthropology.

The roundtable panel will begin with **brief** presentations by each member that will raise a few key issues around which we can then have an open discussion with our colleagues in the audience to draw in their experiences and assessments.

[Note: Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen will be taking the place of Dixon Wong.]