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Osaka University

Overcoming Barriers to Global Humanities Research in an Age of Immobility

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In a year that saw a significant percentage of university courses shifted from traditional in-person instruction to a variety of virtual formats due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students in the Global Japanese Studies Program at Osaka University attended courses not only from locations near the university's campuses in Toyonaka, Suita, and Minoh, but also from the safety of their homes around the world. Together, students and instructors in the Global Japanese Studies Program became intimately familiar with both the possibilities and the limitations of performing academic work in an online environment. In order to maintain a high level of communication between instructors and students, English-medium courses in the Global Japanese Studies Program were conducted as real-time online sessions using videoconferencing software. This allowed students to receive ongoing feedback on their work. It also ensured that students participating in discussion-based courses could continue to improve their skills at public speaking and debate through the sort of interaction with classmates that is not possible via on-demand or text-only classes. On the other hand, conducting courses in real time often required students participating from North America or Europe to attend courses in the dead of the night. We were forced to find new ways to adapt to these sorts of particular circumstances in a way that constantly reminded us of the diverse nature of the Osaka University community. Precisely because the Global Japanese Studies Program focuses on the important opportunities and new perspectives that arise through global mobility, the state of immobility in which we found ourselves this year only served to strengthen our belief in the essential nature of international and intercultural cooperation.

With this in mind, one of our most important choices this year was the decision to proceed with plans to hold the third annual meeting of the Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies, an English-medium symposium sponsored by the Osaka University Graduate School of Letters and the Consortium for Global Japanese Studies, in December 2020. We were required to shift the venue of the conference to permit attendees to present their research in safe conditions, and there were several times when we wondered whether it would be impossible to hold the conference as scheduled. Yet it was clear that there were many students who would benefit from attending the

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conference and being exposed to the innovative learning environment offered by the Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies, particularly because of the cancellation of many other international conferences in 2020. In addition, one of our key responsibilities in this difficult period is the preservation of institutional memory. By pressing forward with the conference, we were able to put it in a position to continue to develop and expand in a post-pandemic academic world.

In the end, the number of graduate student speakers who took part in the Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies actually increased despite the logistical challenges involved in participation. This edition of the conference featured eight graduate student speakers who received feedback from **Inaga Shigemi**, Professor of Art History at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto; **Unoda Shōya**, Professor of Japanese Studies at Osaka University; **Yufei Zhou**, Senior Research Fellow at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo; and **Felipe Augusto Soares Motta**, a Specially Appointed Assistant Professor at Osaka University who began teaching courses in the Global Japanese Studies Program this year. All of these scholars have our thanks for their contributions to the conference. In particular, Professor Unoda was adamant about convening the conference despite the many difficulties it faced, and Professor Inaga—as a disembodied voice connecting to the conference from off-site—persevered throughout the day to give insightful comments to each of the presenters. I also gave comments to the speakers, and for the first time a small audience of Osaka University students participating in the Global Japanese Studies Program was able to observe the conference in person. The conference included the following presentations:

- * **Muhammad Reza Rustam** (Hiroshima University): “Oyster Cultivation Relying Upon Foreign Workers: A Study of Indonesian Workers in Hiroshima”
- * **Omino Akira** (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): “The Contested Transformation of Sanya as a *Doyagai* in Postwar Japan’s High-Growth Era”
- * **Park Keunmo** (Nagoya University): “The Transformation of Food Culture in Zainichi Korean Society: An Anthropological Case Study of the Ikaino and Ikuno Areas”
- * **Xinyi Wang** (Nagoya University): “Disability Matters: The Boundary Between Disability and Non-Disability in Contemporary Japanese Films”
- * **Xuanjing Wang** (Hiroshima University): “On the Present Situation and Future Prospects of the Literature of Repatriation: The Case of Manchuria”
- * **Bang Mina** (Osaka University): “Interpretation of ‘Local Color’ in Katō Shōrinjin’s Images of Korea”

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- * **Kanako Okumura** (Nagoya University): “Transboundary Memories: A Critical Analysis of Images of the Water Cycle in Morisaki Kazue’s ‘A Drawing of Water’”
- * **Naitō Nozomu** (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): “The Problem of Class Conflicts in Tanabe Hajime’s *Logic of Species*: Criticism of Technocratic Production of Scientific Knowledge”

Three of these presenters made the trek to Osaka University’s Nakanoshima Center, while the others connected to the conference online and were able to view the inside of the conference room throughout the day via a 360-degree camera. All of the conference participants deserve a great deal of praise for rising to meet the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presents to the completion of research projects. Preparing for a conference presentation under the shadow of the pandemic meant overcoming a variety of other original hurdles as well. While panelists at the Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies give their talks in their second or third languages every year, this year brought the added challenge of learning the “new language” necessary for online conference participation and operating in hybrid formats. We have learned that participating in a conference in the new online environment necessitates changing not only video conferencing backgrounds, but also the style of one’s speech, how contextual information and evidence are introduced on presentation slides, and strategies for maintaining concentration when listening to others’ talks. The Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies served as one step in learning this new language. The hybrid format of the conference was a particularly important practical experience for instructors in the Global Japanese Studies Program, since we will shift English-medium courses in the Global Japanese Studies Program to a new hyflex (hybrid in-person and online) format in the spring of 2021.

This year’s edition of *The Anthology of Transborder Cultural Studies* contains a diverse selection of papers based upon the research presented at the December conference; we hope that the papers and their authors have benefitted from the feedback they received. The first article published here is “Complicating the Boundary Between Disability and Non-Disability: *Pure White* (2017) and *Coffee and Pencil* (2011)” by **Xinyi Wang**, a master’s student at Nagoya University. The paper uses examples from contemporary Japanese fiction and documentary film to analyze recent changes in the representation of “disability” in Japan.

Our second article written by a presenter from the December conference is “The Voices of Women: The Literature of Manchurian Repatriation”. This piece is the work of **Xuanjing Wang**, a doctoral student at Hiroshima University. Drawing upon the writings of Fujiwara Tei, Miyao Tomiko, and Sawachi Hisae, the article examines how and why Japanese women’s writing about

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postwar repatriation from Manchuria has changed over time, and how Japan has understood or reinterpreted World War II during the postwar period. Because much of my own research focuses on the need to recognize the considerable impact of repatriation on postwar Japanese literature and society, it is very gratifying to see that interest in this topic is continuing to spread.

Finally, we have the research notes of **Park Keunmo**, who writes about “The Transformation of Food Culture in Zainichi Korean Society, an Anthropological Case Study of the Ikaino–Ikuno Area”. Based upon careful participant observation, Park presents some of his conclusions about the history and evolution of food culture among members of the Japanese-resident Korean community in Osaka. He argues that this food culture differs from both Korean food culture and the surrounding Japanese food culture in meaningful ways, while incorporating elements of each.

As you can see, the topics of these papers are intimately connected to ideas of migration, movement, and the meaning of “normalcy”—issues that are pressing at any time, but that we must be particularly sure to reconsider thoroughly and responsibly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are happy to have the opportunity to distribute the work of these researchers in *The Anthology of Transborder Cultural Studies* and hope that their experience at the Graduate Conference in Japanese Studies will be of use to them when they write and present in English at future events.

We also hope that the current period of immobility serves as an opportunity to reflect upon the significance and future of “global humanities” and “global Japanese Studies”, both in academia and in our everyday lives. It is important to note that the Global Japanese Studies Program was created before the pandemic began, and the foresight involved in the creation of the program helped Osaka University prepare for several of the new educational challenges presented by the pandemic. Meanwhile, while the English title of our anthology contains the word *transborder*, it is proving increasingly difficult to cross borders today. Government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have made new travel to Japan impossible for foreign nationals, the number of “returning” passengers arriving in Japan remains severely limited by strict regulations, and extended periods of quarantine are required of those who do succeed in disembarking here. It is, of course, essential that the pandemic be brought under control. What remains to be seen is how we will reenvision the idea of transborder movement to match the circumstances of this new era, and how we and other researchers around the world can use the shared experience of these plague years to open the door to new developments in the study of global humanities.