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# Introduction to the *Beyond Japanese Studies* Special Issue

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Japan-oriented researchers are today conscious that due to ongoing changes in the academic landscape they must consider how their work goes beyond Japanese Studies. Depending on their research interests, they must highlight how their research reverberates more widely. What is the relevance of ‘global studies’, trans-national and trans-cultural aspects of the human, natural, economic and physical world? Simultaneously, we are increasingly aware of how the COVID-19 pandemic has already transformed, and continues to transform, academia. This Special Issue, *Beyond Japanese Studies: Challenges, Opportunities and COVID-19*, represents the thirteenth volume of *New Voices in Japanese Studies* and is the result of an ambitious project which has extended throughout the past year.

In late 2020, **Series Editor Elicia O’Reilly** and myself discussed a virtual symposium which we envisaged could lead to a Special Issue of this journal. The idea became reality and Elicia and I hosted the *Beyond Japanese Studies: Challenges, Opportunities and COVID-19* co-presented by The Japan Foundation, Sydney and the University of New England (UNE) in February 2021, fully online. The symposium was opened with a Welcome to Country led by Anaiwan (Armidale) elder Uncle Colin Ahoy, Professor Jane Edwards (UNE), and a welcome from The Japan Foundation, Sydney director, Mr Keiji Shono. We were grateful to Professor Gracia Liu Farrer from Waseda University for her presentation of a keynote speech. The intention of the symposium and the following Special Issue was firstly, to support and encourage Early Career Researchers (ECRs) with an interest in Japan, and secondly, to contribute to the ongoing global conversation about prospects and avenues for thinking ‘Beyond Japanese Studies’. The call for abstracts for the initial symposium was wider than previous calls made by this journal, and the range of scholars selected were from further afield. We are excited that the authors of papers within this volume represent a broad range of locations and perspectives from across the Asia-Pacific region.

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Fifteen Early Career Researchers, including four PhD students and eleven recent doctoral graduates, presented at the symposium on a wide range of topics including race and identity, civil society, anthropology, geography, digital ethnography, linguistics, LGBTQA+, migration history and international affairs. The online public audience included participants from around the world, taking in Australia, Japan, the United States and South-East Asia, and incorporating more than 120 people over the two days. Following the symposium, a selection of the presenters were invited to submit a full paper—either an article, or discussion paper—for inclusion in this Special Issue, *Beyond Japanese Studies*.

Doing fieldwork in Japan is a common strategy for research within Japanese Studies. In the first article in this issue, **Shu Min Yuen** of the National University of Singapore writes on the basis of intensive anthropological research in Japan, interviewing in the trans community. Yuen writes that careful fieldwork can cause us to question our own assumptions while shedding new light on varied phenomena. Raising the importance of critiquing a hegemonic ‘Eurocentric’ outlook, Yuen also emphasises the value of the marginality of her own research field by its capacity to disrupt an often heteronormative or apparently homogenous surface of society. Yuen’s qualitative insights add depth to her discussions. The second article, written by a law scholar, reorients us to the Mekong subregion of Asia. **Nobumichi Teramura** of the University of Brunei Darussalam and The University of Sydney showcases a somewhat forgotten potential of Japanese law, beyond the archipelago of Japan. In the Mekong, especially Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, he writes, Japanese legal scholars have for many years offered legal technical assistance and varied support, and yet this contribution is often neglected in anglophone scholarship. Teramura deftly describes the current context of this subregion in terms of economic change and impacts due to COVID-19, reviewing an expansive range of literature and offering suggestions for potential areas of future involvement. The third article is written in direct response to the impacts of COVID-19, contributed by **Joshua Schlachet** of the University of Arizona. Schlachet draws on his own research of late Tokugawa health manuals to make three provocations. He asks, “Can you question science in a pandemic?”

Two discussion papers follow the articles, the first courtesy of **Maria Cynthia B. Barriga**, an oral historian and recent PhD graduate who relates Japanese Studies from the point of view of the ‘Nan’yō’, an imperial-era term for the South Seas. By integrating examples from her own research on historiographies of the Philippines, Barriga shows the relevance in postcolonial Davos and Guam of reading and interrogating Japanese-language documents, and questioning who is Japanese in the case of mixed identity Filipino-Japanese and CHamoru-Japanese *mestizos*. **Swati Arora** contributes the second discussion paper in this issue, as a PhD researcher who was in Japan as a Japan Foundation Fellow when she found herself wondering how to manage her fieldwork upon the onset of COVID-19. While the experience caused significant difficulties, Arora remains upbeat about the possibilities of online digital research and summarises concisely the continuing research about how to manage such challenges in the future.

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The final part of this volume incorporates three book reviews. There is a certain symmetry from the symposium to the journal issue as the first book reviewed is authored by **Gracia Liu-Farrer**, given her involvement as keynote in February 2021. **Aoife Wilkinson** of The University of Queensland reviews Liu-Farrer's 2020 book, *Immigrant Japan*, which stands to greatly enhance our understanding of immigrant experiences in, and contributions to, contemporary Japanese society. **Allison Alexy's** *Intimate Disconnections*, the second book reviewed, opens up the world of marriage and divorce in Japan. **Laura Clark** of The University of Queensland writes that the book will become 'canonical' for contemporary scholars within and beyond Japanese studies. The final review concludes the volume with my own appraisal of a new handbook in the field of Japanese Studies: *Studying Japan*, edited by **Nora Kottman** and **Cornelia Reiher**.

My hearty congratulations to The Japan Foundation, Sydney upon the timely publication of this volume, and for its ongoing and integral support of Early Career Researchers and PhD candidates in the region. Personally, it was an exciting project to be involved in as Guest Editor. The publication also required significant collaboration, and I would like to thank especially the expert reviewers and of course, the authors, for the efforts by which they participated in the work toward the production of this issue. Lastly, I am enormously grateful to Series Editor Elicia O'Reilly for her energetic and tenacious commitment to this project.