

JAWS

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JAPAN ANTHROPOLOGY WORKSHOP NEWSLETTER NO. 51

2016

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JAWS FROM THE DEEP

Laura DALES and Aline HENNINGER Interview William KELLY

This is the second of a series of interviews we offer to JAWS members. The idea for this series originated at the JAWS dinner at the European Association of Japanese Studies in Ljubljana. We envisage this series as a dialogue between junior and senior scholars in the field, a way to address questions of generational difference and changes in the theories and practice of the anthropology of Japan.

William W. Kelly

William W. Kelly is Professor of Anthropology and the Sumitomo Professor of Japanese Studies and is chair of the Department of Anthropology at Yale University. He has served as chair of the Council on East Asian Studies (1988-1991) and was chair of the Department of Anthropology in 1995-2000 and 2005-2010. A noted authority on the social and historical anthropology of Japan, Kelly focused much of his research for two decades on regional society in Japan, based on extensive fieldwork in the Shōnai area of Yamagata Prefecture. Among his publications from this project are books on Water Control in Tokugawa Japan and Deference and Defiance in 19th-Century Japan. He has also written widely on the broader dynamics of class formation in Japanese society.

At the same time, much of his research for the past two decades has explored sport and body culture and their significance in modern Japan. From 1996 to 2003, he conducted field research in the Kansai area of Japan on the patterns of professional baseball in the cities of Osaka and Kobe. He has published many articles in English and Japanese on this work and is now finishing a book on one of the Kansai clubs, the Hanshin Tigers, titled *The Hanshin Tigers and the Practices of Professional Baseball in Modern Japan*. His research on sport then broadened to growing influence of soccer and the Olympic Movement in reshaping notions of ethnicity, gender, and citizenship in Japan and East Asia. His publications include *Fanning the Flames: Fandoms and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan* (Edited, SUNY Press, 2004), *This Sporting Life: Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan* (Edited, Yale Council on East Asian Studies Occasional Monograph Series, 2007), and *The Olympics in East Asia: The Crucible of Localism, Nationalism, Regionalism, and Globalism* (Edited with Susan Brownell, Yale Council on East Asian Studies Occasional Monograph Series, 2010), and *The New Geopolitics of Sport in East Asia* (Edited with J. A. Mangan, Routledge, 2014). He is presenting writing a book on the history of Japan anthropology and its importance for Japan studies and for sociocultural anthropology.

We interviewed Professor William Kelly during the JAWS conference, on the 5th of September 2015, at Istanbul Bogazici University



1) How did you come to study Japan?

Actually I'm not sure that my personal origin story is very interesting, but like many of my colleagues, I came to the study of Japan in a very circumstantial way. I entered my PhD program (at Brandeis, outside of Boston) after several years of teaching high school anthropology and history, and I intended to study Nepal and Tibetans in Nepal. But my girlfriend at the time was beginning to study Japanese art history, and it seemed like the relationship would not go very far if I started to study Nepali and she began Japanese language, so I switched my focus to study Japan with her. By then I was finishing my second year in the program and had completed all of my coursework, so I've actually never taken a class in any subject to do with Japan (there was nothing on Japan anyway in my PhD program!). Of course it took several years of intensive Japanese language study before I could begin my dissertation project, but I still feel like something of a fraud in never having taken a course on Japan. Nonetheless, that girlfriend is now my wife of forty years, so I certainly made the right choice, for personal if not for intellectual reasons!

I was very much an outsider to the existing centres of Japan studies at the time in the U.S, particularly at Michigan, Cornell, Harvard, Pittsburgh, and Stanford. But I found most of the senior people of that generation to be very accepting. As an outsider, it was certainly difficult to get research funding, and it took a couple times before I got sufficient grants to complete my dissertation. But I found the Japan anthropology community in the United States to be very supportive, and it remains so today.

After returning from my doctoral research in Japan, I moved to Ann Arbor because my wife was entering the Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan and I wrote my dissertation there. Again, Richard Beardsley, the eminent Japan anthropologist and then director of its Centre for Japanese Studies, was very welcoming and provided a stimulating place to be writing. When I finished, Robert J. Smith of Cornell very kindly agreed to serve as external examiner and has ever since been a source of inspiration and support.

2) What have been your significant influences? Either the theoretical and academic ones or personal ones?

I am of course much indebted to my sempai scholars of Japan anthropology—those above as well as Ron Dore, Takie Lebra, Tom Rohlen, Keith Brown, Dave Plath, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, and others. When I went to Japan to begin my dissertation research, the anthropologist Yoneyama Toshinao agreed to be my sponsor; he was very helpful to many young foreign anthropologists at the time. He had been one of the first Japanese anthropologists to come to the US with the Fulbright Programme, along with the psychologist Sumiko Iwao. At the last minute, he had to leave for research in Africa as I arrived and he passed me on to Inuma Jirō, a Japanese agricultural historian, a noted scholar of Japanese Christianity, and a dedicated activist who had been the Kyoto head of Beiheiren, the Anti-Vietnam War movement. Despite his Christian social activism, he was on the US State Department's no-entry list. I always regret that I was unable to correct that gross injustice despite many years of petitioning on his behalf. He too was very supportive of my research plans and got me started on a line of contacts that eventually led to my two years of field research in Shonai Plain in Yamagata.

Apart from periodic reports back to Inuma-sensei, my only scholarly experience was to present a brief paper at the annual Tōhō Gakkai meetings at the University of Tokyo. When I arrived, I discovered that the discussant for our session was none other than Nakane Chie, who had a rather fierce reputation. I was still in the midst of fieldwork, still unsure of what I was doing and where it was going, and my topic—on irrigation, agricultural, and social organization—was something Nakane-sensei herself had a

written a book about, so I was quite terrified. In fact, she was very helpful and offered lots of critical feedback, and I came away with very warm feelings towards her. Of course some of her broad commentaries on Japanese society were already roundly criticized, but I think people don't appreciate two things. First, she developed a comparative framework of India, China and Japan at a time everybody was fixated on comparing Japan to the US. Also, she did really fine-grained historical ethnography with some noted historians and sociologists. Her monograph published in the LSE series (Kinship and Economic Organization in Rural Japan) is, I think, the best work she's ever done and I still go back to it, though not many people ever read it.

The same is true for Richard Beardsley's "Village Japan", which was one of my influences in Japan. Again it's infrequently read now and was much criticized as a small-bore community study but in fact in American anthropology it was quite important. This was a team of four major scholars – an historian, a geographer, a political scientist, and an anthropologist—who did long term fieldwork in a village, but they were placing it in a very large geographical and historical context. What they actually showed was you can only do local studies in Japan if you have a sufficiently broad geographical and historical framework. And this was done in the 1950s, and with work by Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, Clifford Geertz (his Javanese and Balinese village work) and others, Village Japan actually showed the discipline how to get beyond the "community study." It's an example of ways in which the anthropology of Japan has more often been a pioneer not a backwater.

The rubric for analysis that many of us were using in the 1980s, when I started teaching, was the intersections of culture and political economy. We were influenced by Wolf on the one hand and Geertz on the others, and our focus was how formations of culture and political economy formed the historical dynamics for a particular area.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, two of my other influences were the British cultural Marxist scholars, E.P Thomson and Raymond Williams. Also important were strands of historical sociology – especially Charles Tilly in the US and Peter Burke in England, who showed how an anthropologist doing fieldwork at a contemporary moment can use the archives and local history to embed that moment into the forces that produced it. And that's what we were trying to do.

3) Has there been anything that has unexpectedly or significantly shifted your trajectory or taken you on a different course to what you planned?

Well, you know, I think for most of us our career, like our life, is largely serendipitous and serpentine. You reach an age where you retrospectively imagine a logic to your career, but then you admit that there really was no logic to its unfolding. I began with an interest in the historical dynamics of the Shōnai region, but I realised that to my host families and colleagues in Kyoto and Tokyo, rural Yamagata in the 1970s and 80s was but the backward countryside to their modern metropolitan lives. However, over the 2 years that I lived with several farm families, I ended up more impressed with the similarities than the differences in metropolitan and regional lifeways. That led me to trying to tease out the notion of *chūryū ishiki*, or mainstream consciousness, which seemed to have more ideological potency than just bland sloganeering in shaping (and disguising) class sensibilities.

Perhaps a more radical shift was my research interest in sports, which started in the mid- 1990s. The motivation here was not some personal fascination with sports, but rather in response to my experience in teaching about Japan in the U.S in the 1980s, a decade of American fear and awe of Japan Inc. and Japan-bashing, etc. Most of my students were coming to my courses with this Orientalist binary, and many of them had read *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, a 1977 book on baseball by the American writer Robert Whiting. Whiting had gone to Japan in the late 1960s (and is still living and writing from there). He is a fine stylist and deeply knowledgeable about Japanese baseball, but his many books and articles over the decades have perpetuated a radical, Orientalist divide between Japanese baseball, conservative and self-sacrificing, and US baseball, independent and creative. For him, it has been a metonym for the United States and Japan.

As an anthropologist, such a sharp binary was easy to criticize in class and one could look quite sophisticated in taking apart his writings, but I realised I actually knew nothing about Japanese baseball, so I ended up doing some long-term fieldwork with professional teams in Osaka and Kobe. That, in turn, led to further work on soccer (football), sumo and the Olympic movement. So Robert Whiting remains quite stimulating to me and quite irritating (as I to him)! We tend to think of influences as positive, but irritants can be equally important for academics and particularly for anthropologists. Also, I suppose we're not like other social scientists – being committed to the open-endedness of fieldwork, we're closer to historians, who get into archives and what they find can lead them in unexpected directions. Our influences are always as much the people we encounter in the course of the research as the original intellectual stimulus.

4) How did you come to be involved with JAWS?

I knew about it when it started, and I've been a dues-paying member for many years. I don't often get to the meetings, which is to say we American members can't often come. Their timing, frequently in September, makes it hard for us because our academic year begins earlier than in the UK and Europe. Also, we do feel committed to going to the American Anthropological Association, and the Association for Asian Studies, and our universities typically will not fund a third conference. I sometimes sense that some of my JAWS colleagues feel that we Americans look down on JAWS, but this isn't true. From my American perspective, JAWS is another example of a pioneer. There is nothing else in anthropology that brings together scholars from so many countries who are focused on a particular world region. It is a model for global scholarly exchange before that was a buzzword. JAWS is another way in which Japanese anthropology is distinctive, and I think many of my American colleagues feel the same way

Will AAS, JAWS, and other associations continue in the same way as now? I'm not sure. I think the challenge for younger scholars is to rethink what these linkages might most efficiently be. You can't just use 20th-century organizations; they're probably not going to serve your needs. There have to be ways for scholarly communication to be enabled by new technologies. There have been some initial uses of digital and virtual communication that have been problematic, but it certainly has enormous advantages and potential for real academic exchange. I think it's up to younger scholars to explore some of those prospects for best practices.

5) What other challenges do you see for new researchers?

I'm impressed with the language abilities of recent younger students and scholars. Some of the undergraduate students are entering university with three years of Japanese already. Our problem is increasing the levels of language instruction to keep up with the abilities of our undergraduates. More of them now are going to Japan for study abroad and coming back with even higher demands for Japanese language, and the JET program has certainly brought in a whole group of potential PhD students. And the level of language ability for our incoming PhD students is certainly higher than it was ten years ago. I find younger scholars very impressive in their spoken and written Japanese.

To me the real challenge now is not language skills but rather the overwhelming volume of scholarship one is faced with. When I was in graduate school in the 1970s, I could spend a semester and read everything that there was to read about Japan in English at

least – it took me longer for Japanese. At this point there have been upwards of 400 PhDs (and their dissertations!) in Japan anthropology, just in English language. There's no way that a graduate student can read a fraction of those dissertations or the monographs or articles. And yet you need to begin to get a handle on the literature that's going to help you or irritate you or stimulate you. To me that is the real challenge – and it's a challenge for teachers as well as for PhD students. How do I teach? It's easy for me to give them a list and say "read this", but that's of no help. How does one develop in the 21st century a way of bringing new scholars into anthropology generally, into the anthropology of Japan, whatever theoretical fields that interest them. It is our joint responsibility to figure out a pedagogy of professional instruction that addresses that.

6) Do you think that the label "Japanese studies" or "Asian/Oriental studies" has helped to promote anthropology of Japan, or on the contrary, has it reinforced the isolation of Japanese specialists?

I have never felt isolated! This is an American answer perhaps, but "Japanese studies" or "East Asian studies" in the United States can refer to an undergraduate major and it can refer to a master's degree; there is dissertation and research funding for Japan, so there are ways that this is a rubric for teaching and getting money. However, there are virtually no PhD programs in East Asian studies or Japanese studies. Our silos are disciplinary silos, not regional silos so most of us have never felt particularly isolated from fellow anthropologists. Virtually all PhDs come from anthropology departments, and Japanese anthropology (and anthropologists) have played significant roles in major anthropology departments.

If there is arrogance among American and other native English speaking scholars, it is unintentional, albeit still regrettable, and it concerns language. English is the lingua franca of Japan anthropology; odd, unfortunate, but still giving us and our journals an immediate and unfair advantage. European scholars seem to impressively and easily work in at least two languages beyond their own – English and Japanese. More disadvantaged are Japanese scholars themselves; even if they go to the AJJ they will often speak in English rather than in Japanese.

We haven't resolved but must confront this language issue in an equitable way. As Gordon Matthews and others have argued, another dimension is the hegemony of American and British journals. I don't entirely agree with him but he has done an extraordinary job in publicizing the issue and seeking solutions. It is an issue that JAWS itself might assume some leadership as well.

7) Do you think the anthropology of Japan is sufficiently outward-looking?

This has certainly been much debated. There are too many anthropologists of Japan who do feel we're too inward-looking, too parochial. My view is different. Japan anthropology, from a U.S perspective, is well connected in three different directions. We are a part of the discipline of anthropology and we speak to and write for other anthropologists. But Japan studies, much more than most other regional fields is densely multidisciplinary, and we engage political scientists and historians and film scholars and others—both Japanese and foreign—who are working on Japan. Many parts of the world don't have the advantage of a sophisticated and longstanding indigenous scholarly tradition of relevance to social science like Japan. Thirdly, especially for us in the U.S, there is the public interest for Japan. So many people want to talk about Japan and learn about Japan (sometimes with entrenched stereotypes), and we are always having to figure out ways of translating anthropology to the general audience that is responsible and effective.

And you have to balance time you spend in dialogue with anthropologists, with other scholars, with the general public. That leads me to the view I've always had, that if anything we are too connected. Perhaps people feel we are inward looking because we're so busy doing these other things as well.

Of course, the American perspective is coloured by the 1980s, when Japan loomed so large in American fears and fascination. I started teaching in 1980 and by the mid 1980s I was teaching around 125 undergraduates and half of them wanted to become investment bankers and go to Wall Street and make a lot of money working with the Japanese. That ended and then there was a lull in interest, a story played out in many parts of the world. Then we faced the anime/ manga/ pop culture boom that drew in other sorts of students. I was not particularly interested in business and economic organisation in the 1980s, nor in manga and anime in the 1990s but we must take the students who walk into the classroom, and develop teaching strategies and teaching curricula that challenge them and grow them. We've seen much fluctuation in student numbers over the years, not a steady rise or fall but periodic ups and downs. It's unpredictable, although generally Japanese language numbers have been steady in the United States.

8) What are the major changes you see beyond JAWS, in the general context of the anthropology of Japan?

I don't have an answer for that. I've been wrong too many times! In the 1980s and 90's, I'm not sure that I'd have anticipated the topics that people then went on to develop for Japan. It's hard for me to anticipate because it's not only our individual research that stimulates

further research. It's also what happens to Japan. We take our cue from what we think is happening in Japan, so it's difficult to anticipate ten years down the road. And we also take our cue from the larger discipline, and it's even harder to anticipate where that's going.

9) Why is sport important?

Well, this depends on what you're asking - sport is important for what? If for Japan, to take a small example, most of the urban transport in Tokyo and Kansai in the early 20th century were private rail-lines, competing fiercely to extend their lines and increase their ridership. Together with the new newspapers, trying to raise readership, they saw mass leisure and entertainment as a key promotional strategy. So not only baseball tournaments and baseball stadiums, but other sports facilities and events were pushed competitively for readers of newspapers and riders of trains. In that sense, sports and physical recreation were a real stimulus for the particular patterns of political economy that shaped both Kansai and Kanto.

To take another example, Japan probably has the most developed corporate sports system in the world. Japan's success in the Olympics depends almost entirely on corporate sports—significantly for women as well as men. Or you can analyse the explosive growth of FIFA (the world soccer body) in East Asia and its geopolitics. One reason that soccer is becoming more important in the region and may well overtake baseball in Japan is that soccer is the one sport that East Asia nations can fight about on fairly equal terrain; it's the one sport that can provoke the kinds of rivalries and antagonisms. Through soccer, Japan can reimagine its global connections, to Europe, to Africa, to South America. So there are ways in which sport has an economic power and a geopolitical significance. For anthropology, there's a lot that sport can contribute to STS studies. I've always found it intriguing analytically to think about sports – because they are set up to define and defend absolute binaries, but in doing sports you end up transgressing binaries. In fact sports is a tangle of the mind and the spirit and the body.

10) What do you think are the greatest challenges for our institutions?

Senior scholars have the luxury of reflecting upon this, while junior scholars actually must confront these challenges, with quite serious consequences for survival and advancement. The casualization of academic labor, the shrinking of funding, the rise of audit regimes—these are pressing—and depressing—trends. To single out one by example, the demands of institutional review boards have special impact on anthropologists, especially at American universities but now elsewhere as well. In principle, it is appropriate that we

should deal with and through IRB to insure responsible research. But IRB in practice has been quite problematic for us because it emerged in the medical sciences and then it moved to more quantitative and lab fields. It's still very difficult for IRB to understand and to develop standards for long-term qualitative fieldwork. My fear is that PhD students, in formulating their research, will feel increasingly pressured to shape their projects to what will get through the human subjects committee. Younger scholars are coming into a social science that is now subject to such scepticism and review.

If IRB affects our research, bibliometrics are coming to affect the outcomes. I find this trend deeply dangerous, affecting departments, universities, and the fate of individual scholars. And it's largely bogus in all sorts of ways. Bibliometrics are spurious numbers, used to quantify the wrong things, and then applied to scholars in misleading ways.

Yet another distressing development, which may be particular to the US, is the ever-widening inequality between a few very rich and over-privileged universities with huge endowments (such as the one I teach at), and everyone else. This is not an inequality of faculty or students—scholarly brilliance and productivity definitely does not map on to this resource distribution—which makes it even more distressing that the differences are so unwarranted.

To add just one thing, I would say that among junior scholars there seems to be a theory anxiety, and among senior scholars a theory defensiveness—the anxiety and defensiveness that anthropology of Japan is all about thick description and has never been willing or able to contribute to something called “theory.” To me that's gravely mistaken because it is a persistent elision of theory and analysis. What we do best as anthropologists is to analyse social life, whether through interpretation or explanation. For us, theory is a method. We use theory to help us understand something important about human social experience, and to represent that fairly and to analyse that in a useful way. Most of us don't find our mission in using our social life or human experience to build abstract social theory—it is to offer meaningful analysis.

For over 70 years, Japan anthropology has built up the largest ethnographic archive of modernity in the world. There is much to exploit and discover in this archive that we've built up. The kind of perspective and analysis that an anthropologist does at the moment can have a lot of historical depth but it doesn't have future projections. When you line up the books and monographs of the last 70 years you have something that doesn't exist anywhere else in the discipline. If you really want to understand the modern condition, it seems to me that the anthropology of Japan is the first and best place to go.