

# Japan and the World

## Newsletter



### *Greetings from the Chair*

Dear Alumni, Alumnae and Supporters of Japanese Studies at Cambridge,

It would be an understatement to say that 2020 seems uncertain to many of us. From negotiations between the UK and the EU on a trade deal to the spread of the Coronavirus across the globe, we have already experienced some disruptions and will likely continue to do so. But, in the midst of all this, you may rest assured that the students and faculty of Japanese Studies at Cambridge will continue to be visible at different forums, conduct our research and to the greatest extent possible, make a positive impact in Japanese Studies and beyond.

Since our last newsletter in October, our faculty members have, as always, been extremely active as we continue to serve as one of the most influential hubs of Japanese Studies. Professor Kushner has published a seminal article on history and propaganda in China's war museums, and very recently, he delivered a fascinating talk at the Swedish Collegium in the marvellous city of Uppsala as part of his fellowship there. In late November, I was honoured to give a short speech at Toshiba International Foundation's Thirtieth Anniversary Dinner in Tokyo. I emphasised not just the importance of our partnership, which has enabled us to raise our profile considerably, but also of TIFO's extensive support of Japanese Studies across the globe. We wish TIFO our best with the hopes that we will be part of the celebrations again in another ten years.

Dr Moretti has been busy planning for the seventh annual Summer School in Japanese Early Modern Palaeography, and has recently expanded her interest to a collaboration with a machine-reading project to assist in the study of Edo period documents. Dr Young spent Michaelmas Term on sabbatical in California (UCLA), where she gave talks and participated in a workshop focusing on Okinawan literature, while preparing articles for publication. Dr Steger, who is a co-PI for a massive Cambridge project on plastics and recycling, organised, together with her two research assistants, Dr O'Hare and Dr Perez, an international conference in late November, focusing on the social life of plastic. Notably, a small group of our fourth-year undergraduate students also participated and made presentations as part of the conference. It goes without saying that such engagement and participation by our students reflect exactly how brilliant our undergraduates are.

Speaking of current and former students, you will find a fascinating report in this newsletter from Ms Anya Melkina, one of our fabulous former MPhil students. She graduated in 2018, and soon got a superb position at the Ministry of Economic Development in Russia, where she produces policy reports and uses her excellent Japanese language skills to interpret in meetings between high-ranking Russian and Japanese ministers and staff. We are proud of Anya's accomplishments and grateful that she chose Japanese Studies at Cambridge for her Masters, and we wish her continued success. We would of course like to hear more about our alumni, so if you want to share your story or just a recent update, please do not hesitate to contact us. This newsletter is designed to keep our supporters and alumni/alumnae informed about what we are doing, but also to help you connect to one another. So, despite what 2020 throws at us, we will continue to work hard to engage Japan with the world of academe and in general. Our East Asia Seminar series, for which the Lent Term programme is included, is of course another good example of this, and should you be in the neighbourhood, feel free to attend.

Enjoy the newsletter.

Mickey Adolphson  
Keidanren Professor and Chair  
Japanese Studies  
University of Cambridge

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February  
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We hear from one of our recent MPhil graduates about life in the Russian Ministry of Economic Development

## 4. East Asia Seminar Series

A look ahead at the exciting talks taking place this term in the East Asia Seminar Series



## Professor Adolphson gives speech at TIFO 30th Anniversary dinner

Keidanren Professor and Chair, Professor Mickey Adolphson, gave the opening remarks at the Toshiba International Foundation's (TIFO) recent 30th Anniversary celebration dinner.

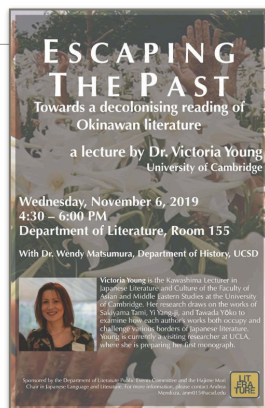


In his speech Professor Adolphson praised the hard work of the foundation over the past three decades in promoting international understanding, and their huge contribution to the field of Japanese Studies worldwide.

Japanese Studies at Cambridge has been one of the direct benefactors of the Foundation's work, with the establishment in 2018 of the Cambridge Toshiba Japan and the World Graduate Scholarship. The inaugural recipient of the Toshiba Scholarship, Ms Giulia Garbangi, who joined us in October 2018, is working towards a PhD examining Japan's envoy diplomacy and its role in regional conflict mediation post-1945.

## Dr Vicky Young flies flag for Cambridge Japanese as visiting researcher at UCLA

Kawashima Lecturer in Japanese Literature and Culture, Dr Vicky Young, spent Michaelmas Term on sabbatical as visiting researcher at the University of California Los Angeles where she was working on her first monograph. During her sabbatical Vicky gave guest lectures at University of California San Diego and UCLA: 'Escaping the Past: Towards a decolonising reading of Okinawan literature'. On December 9th Vicky also took part in 'Okinawa in Writing and Memory: JAG Works in Progress Workshop' UCLA.



On Friday 21 February Vicky will be joining poet Hiromi Ito and translator Jeffrey Angles for an 'in-conversation' event at Cambridge Waterstones. The event is organised by Japan Now. More information on this and other events can be found on the Waterstones website: <https://www.waterstones.com/events/an-evening-with-hiromi-ito-japan-now-2020/cambridge>

## Dr Laura Moretti begins new collaborative project using AI for premodern text recognition

Dr Laura Moretti is starting a new, exciting collaboration with Prof Hashimoto Yuta of the National Museum of Japanese History for the seventh Summer School in Japanese Early Modern Palaeography (<https://wakan.cambridge.com/>). In recent years we have witnessed many projects on artificial intelligence (AI) designed to read or to assist reading premodern cursive Japanese. The project led by Prof Hashimoto, known as *Minna de honkoku* みんなで翻刻, is particularly appealing as it uses AI to help with the study of Japanese early modern palaeography and enhance the reading skills of humans. The Summer School in Japanese Early Modern Palaeography has trained, to date, around 150 young scholars in reading early modern archival materials. This new collaboration is going to offer added value to the participants of the 2020 summer school.

## History and propaganda clash in China's war museums - Professor Barak Kushner

Professor Kushner recently had an article published in the Nikkei Asian Review examining narratives of post-war justice in Chinese museum exhibits.

Full article available to read here:

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Life/History-and-propaganda-clash-in-China-s-war-museums>

For more of Professor Kushner's recent and past research please see <http://www.barakkushner.net>

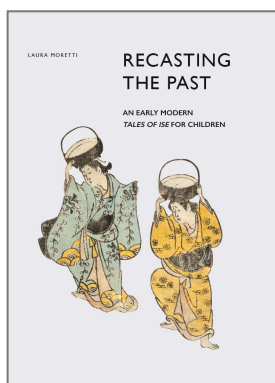




## Dr Laura Moretti invited to give talk on "Children's Picture Books in Early Modern Japan"

In conjunction with the exhibition "[Anno's Journey: The World of Anno Mitsumasa](#)" at Japan House, London, Dr Laura Moretti was invited to give a talk on "Children's Picture Books in Early Modern Japan" on 10 October 2019.

Building upon her published work *Recasting the Past. An Early Modern Tales of Ise for Children* (<https://brill.com/view/title/32816>), in the talk Dr Moretti explored a selection of early modern Japanese children's books, probing how they were constructed to offer cognitive engagement for novice readers and help them to develop diverse knowledge: interpersonal, ethical, practical, fictional and aesthetic.



<https://www.japanhouselondon.uk/whats-on/childrens-picture-books-in-early-modern-japan-talk-by-dr-laura-moretti/>

## Members of local Japanese community join students for conversation exchange

On 22 November last year we were very happy to be joined in the faculty by several members of the local Japanese community, who had kindly volunteered their time for an afternoon of conversation exchange with our second-year undergraduates. These conversation exchange sessions, organised termly by our Language teaching staff Mrs Toshimi Boulding and Dr Miki Kawabata, are an excellent opportunity for the students to put into practice what they have been learning in the classroom and improve their conversational Japanese.



## Dr Kuan-Jen Chen awarded honourable mention from Virginia Military Institute

Dr Kuan-Jen Chen's article, "Projecting Poseidon's Trident: America's East Asia and the Shifting Contours of 1950s Postwar Naval Policy," was awarded an honourable mention in the 2019 Cold War essay contest sponsored by the John Adams '71 Center for Military History & Strategic Analysis at the Virginia Military Institute, USA. Chen's essay argues that the 1950s crises of East Asia can be regarded as the turning point that made the US gradually link its maritime space to its strategic concerns in defence of East Asia. The creation of sea-oriented strategic thinking also laid the groundwork for maintenance of the international security in the Asia-Pacific area during both the Cold War and the post-Cold War.

## "A Drunken Charade?": Finding East Asian Justice in Imperial Decline and Colonial Defeat

As part of Prof Barak Kushner's sabbatical fellowship at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in Uppsala, he delivered a lecture entitled, "A Drunken Charade?": Finding East Asian Justice in Imperial Decline and Colonial Defeat" on Tuesday 28 January, 2020.



To view the lecture please click here: <https://vimeo.com/388163884>

# Getting Drastic with Plastic: Interdisciplinary Research for Japan and the World



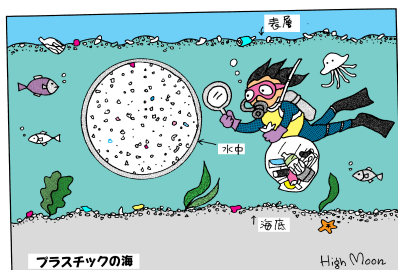
In collaboration with scientists and economists at the University of Cambridge, Dr Brigitte Steger and her colleagues have been awarded a £1m grant by [UK Research and Innovation](#) (UKRI) to study 'Circular Economy Approaches to Eliminate Plastic Waste'. The 18-month project, featured in the University's research magazine [Horizons](#) (Issue 39, pp.32-35), aims to contribute towards the development of a sustainable plastics economy. It established the Cambridge Creative Circular Plastics Centre ([CirPlas](#)) and is led by Professor Erwin Reisner (Chemistry). Dr Steger is one of ten Co-Investigators and the Social and Policy Impact Leader of the project.

Representing the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Steger's project is called 'Cleanliness, Convenience and good Citizenship: Plastic and Waste in Everyday Life'. She has hired Social Anthropologist Dr Patrick O'Hare and Sociologist Dr Teresa

Perez as postdoctoral researchers to compare plastic use and waste internationally. The group is working with the local council and the waste partnership RECAP to develop more efficient plastic waste reduction policies. The team hopes that the collaboration between university and local councils will inspire collaboration between gown and town in other areas as well.

Plastic is an extremely useful and hygienic material for storing food, domestic cleaning products and many other household items; at the same time, there is growing awareness and concern about the tons of plastic waste that are dumped into the environment and often enter the food chain. Using ethnographic methods, the project investigates how the use and disposal of plastic are embedded in the everyday lives of consumers. It asks how people's plastic use and recycling habits are influenced by the legal and procedural systems of waste collection/recycling and their own personal values, lifestyles and understanding of natural and social environments; it also examines people's agency in this matter and how they classify plastic and negotiate social relationships through plastic and waste related activities.

Four cases with different social and cultural background as well as different approaches to plastic use and recycling are investigated: Japan, South Africa, Uruguay and the UK.



'A sea of plastics'. Caricature by High Moon; courtesy Takatsuki Hiroshi, Miyako Ecology Centre, Kyoto.

## Neighbourhood ethnographies in Cambridge and Montevideo

Dr O'Hare conducted in-depth qualitative research in Arbury (Cambridge) from October to December 2019, before travelling to Uruguay where he is currently carrying out a similar neighbourhood ethnography in the Old City of Montevideo. As well as interviews and participant observation, the research involves participants keeping a 'plastic diary'. To document their consumption and disposal of plastic. In Cambridge, the research takes place in the context of local government campaigns to reduce levels of contamination caused by incorrect items being mixed with recyclables. In contrast, in Montevideo, families are adjusting to a new collection scheme. Where once informal waste pickers were wholly responsible for recycling, new containers have been piloted that place the onus on householders to perform this task instead.



A Montevideo Old Town resident collects bottle caps from her neighbours to help a fundraising activity for an animal shelter

## Excess packaging and the notion of *mottainai* in Japan



A woman in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture taking out her sorted waste for recycling.

In autumn 2018 Steger travelled Japan – from Iwate and Fukushima to Miyazaki and Nagasaki – to visit waste disposal and recycling sites, council meetings, conduct narrative interviews and observe practices of household waste disposal. A further fieldwork stint is scheduled for March this year. In Japan, environmental consciousness under the

notion of *mottainai* (wasteful) as well as practices of cleanliness and recycling are highly developed. On the other hand, however, there are few countries with such a high per-capita use of plastic; throwing away single-use plastic is not considered *mottainai*. The project seeks to understand how the moral needs for cleanliness, convenience and good citizenship can be satisfied notwithstanding a reduction of excess packaging and single-use tools.

## Valuing Plastic in South Africa

In addition to being part of CirPlas, Dr Perez won two funding bids awarded by the University of Cambridge, its Public Engagement Starter Fund and the Global Challenges Research Fund. Her project runs in partnership with The Green Anglicans, a faith based movement across Southern Africa who mobilise around environmental issues. Titled 'Valuing Plastic: Evaluating the potential to derive economic, environmental and social value from plastic waste in South Africa,' the aim is to establish a small scale recycling scheme in the township Crossroads in Cape Town. Unlike historically privileged areas of the city, in townships there is no door-to-door collection of recyclables beyond informal provision by individual 'waste pickers'. Instead households are given blue plastic bags for all their waste, which need to be walked to the nearest shipping container. When containers are locked, full, far way, or the journey is deemed too dangerous or inconvenient, some residents dump their waste on street corners. Perez is currently helping to establish the scheme, documenting the process, and conducting interviews with residents to understand existing attitudes towards plastic waste and recycling.

## International Workshop: The Social Life of Plastic

On 8-9 November 2019, scholars from across the humanities and social sciences gathered at The Needham Research Institute to present their work at [The Social Life of Plastic](#) international workshop.



Workshop participants gather in the shadow of autumnal trees in The Needham Research Institute's garden

Participants' disciplines ranged from literature and art to anthropology and climate studies, with representation from sixteen institutions, spanning seven countries, and including practitioners working in partnership with academics.

Presentations contributed to current debates about perceptions of plastic, behaviour change, 'greenwashing', bioplastics, and waste management provision. Interesting contrasts emerged as a result of discussions about the portrayal of plastic as a more or less desirable material, and how these varied over time and

space. For example in the late 1970's, while plastic nets were being hailed as the future of fishing in India, German campaigns were demonising plastic bags. More recently, China has embraced 'circular economy' principles that place plastic at the centre of wrangling between formal and informal waste management processes. Similarly, circular economy has become more prominent in the UK, and single-use plastic and the adverse health effects of micro-plastic have become public concerns. For 4th year Japanese Studies undergraduates and MPhil students, the workshop was their first taste of a conference style academic forum. Airing comments from other delegates, students noted the collaborative and supportive atmosphere of the event.



Lara Horin, 4th year Japanese Studies student presents overarching themes from her group's discussion in the closing plenary session.

## What's next

Selected papers from the Social Life of Plastic workshop will be submitted to a special issue of the Interdisciplinary Worldwide Waste Journal.

Dissemination of research outcomes to non-academic audiences will be at **Cambridge Guildhall on 16 April 2020**. Titled 'Getting Drastic with Plastic: New Approaches to Eliminating Plastic Waste' this forum will digest findings from across all the research groups within CirPlas with the local council, government representatives, businesses, environmental NGOs and other stakeholders.





**Whether it has been just a few months, or a couple of decades, we are always excited to hear from our Japanese Studies alumni and alumnae. So it was a particular pleasure to receive the message below from Ms Anya Melkina, who graduated from the MPhil Japanese Studies course in 2018**

I have now been working for Japan Division (Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects) at the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation for 1 year and almost a quarter (I started right after I graduated from Cambridge back in October 2018).

My main responsibilities include a variety of activities including: analysing trade statistics, analytical report writing and policy paper drafting. I have also been organising talks, negotiating with the Japanese side on joint documents and details of high level meetings, written Russian/Japanese and Russian/English translation and oral interpretation (mainly Russian -> Japanese, occasionally in both directions) at various levels: from Directors of Department to Vice-Ministers to the Minister himself. The tasks are highly demanding and even stressful at times (I worked for 12+ hours each day for a week last December), but the job is mostly enjoyable and I feel that it is just the right thing for me, at least for now.

From the very start of the job I got actively involved in preparation of both annual events (like the annual session of the Russia-Japan Intergovernmental Commission (RJIC) ) and some ad-hoc talks.

My 'debut' as an interpreter for our (already former) Vice-Minister Sergey Gorkov took place at the Subcommission for Trade and Investment of the RJIC less than a month after I started the position.

It took a bit of time before I got more familiar with the Russia-Japan economic relations agenda and more confident at interpreting senior-level officials, but now I have interpreted our Minister, Maksim Oreshkin, 5 times on various occasions to such people as former Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan Seko Hiroshige.

All in all I am happy that, instead of darting into traditional diplomacy straight from my Russian university, I did an MPhil at Cambridge, I acquired new knowledge and skills, as well as a better understanding of what I wanted to do, and ended up where I am now as a result. I love that I can not just interpret but do some research and policy paper writing, so my job is quite balanced and the tasks are diverse.

***Anya Melkina***



*Meeting with Minister Oreshkin and Mr. Seko, Minister of Economy (September 5)*

***Below Anya shares some news reports from events she has attended:***

[https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2019/0610\\_002.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2019/0610_002.html) This was a simple bilateral meeting, but it was very special for me as the first one where I got to interpret our Minister Oreshkin.

[https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2019/0906\\_001.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2019/0906_001.html) This is a brief summary of Mr Seko's visit to Vladivostok for the Eastern Economic Forum held there annually. Section 2 of this press-release has some details of the talks between Mr Seko and Mr Oreshkin as well as a picture of all of us.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/18/c\\_138641060.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/18/c_138641060.htm)

This is not an official statement, but the most adequate article on Russia-Japan Intergovernmental Commission in English

# East Asia Seminar Series

## Lent 2020

This term's East Asia Seminar Series kicked off on Monday 27 January with a very well attended talk from Professor Satoko Shimazaki of UCLA. Prof Shimazaki's talk explored the 'sound properties of nineteenth-century kabuki in an attempt to bring early modern print culture into conversation with modern technologies of sound recording and their reception'.



It was a pleasure to see so many new and familiar faces, and we hope to see many of you at the other exciting talks we have coming up this term. For more information on the seminar series please go to the 'What's on' section of the Faculty website here: <https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/whats-on>

**MONDAY 3  
FEBRUARY**

**DR HALLE O'NEAL**

*University of Edinburgh*

WRITING AGAINST DEATH: BUDDHIST PALIMPSESTS OF MEDIEVAL JAPAN



**MONDAY 10  
FEBRUARY**

**DR ROBERT SIMPKINS**

*SISJAC*

DIY MUSIC, DIY LIVES: THE NEW REALITIES OF MAKING MUSIC IN TOKYO



**MONDAY 17  
FEBRUARY**

**DR TOM KEIRSTEAD**

*University of Toronto*

EVERYDAY DEMONS: RECKONING WITH MONSTERS AND MEDIEVAL JAPAN



**MONDAY 24  
FEBRUARY**

**DR JOSHUA BATTS**

*University of Cambridge*

FULL SHIPS AND EMPTY LETTERS: TOKUGAWA JAPAN'S PACIFIC OVERTURES. 1600-1625



**MONDAY 2  
MARCH**

**PROF TZE M. LOO**

*University of Richmond*

TRAPPED IN TEXT: REDEFINITIONS OF WOMEN'S POWER IN TAISHO-ERA OKINAWA



Unless otherwise stated all talks will take place:

**17:00 - 19:00 in rooms 8/9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.** All talks are free to attend and open to everybody. Please come along, and join us afterwards for a chance to chat.

The Japanese Studies Group gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation towards this seminar series

