

Social Anthropology and Japanese Studies Seminar

Presented by the Department of Social Anthropology
and the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

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The metaphors we relate by in the digital era: young Chinese communities in the Sino-Japanese context

The terms we use to describe our relationships with each other are important signs of how social life is changing. From the loosely defined ‘community’ to the evocative associations of ‘Chinatown’ or ‘enclave’ these ‘metaphors we relate by’ are particularly important for minorities in the process of building new lives in new contexts. In this talk, I draw on 4 years of fieldwork among a nascent network of young Chinese people living in Tokyo, to reflect upon this issue from an anthropological perspective. Chinese citizens now constitute the largest group of non-Japanese residents living in Japan, whether as students, entrepreneurs, or permanent residents. Among the relatively young (under 45) Chinese-speaking people in Northwest Tokyo I have traced the ways in which they are highly conscious of the political implications of how they described their association with each other. Using both classic participant observation alongside visual and digital methods, I found they experimented with new metaphors, terms, and ways of relating that avoid what Joseph Hankins has called ‘the labour of multiculturalism’. Terms such as ‘platform’ and ‘play’ are increasingly key metaphors for social life among many of these networks of young migrants, suggesting that digital mediatization and the platformization of social life is shaping the imaginaries that inform their ways of living and relating.

Jamie Coates is Senior Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield. Trained as an anthropologist (ANU) He combines visual and digital ethnography with historical and textual analysis to explore the relationship between technology, mobility, identity and imagination in urban Northeast Asia. He is currently working on how media and migration change everyday imaginaries in the Sino-Japanese context. His works include “the Cruel Optimism of Mobility” in *positions: Asia Critique*, “So Hot Right Now: reflections on virality and sociality from transnational digital China” in *Digital Culture and Society*, and the ethnographic film “Tokyo Pengyou” in the *Journal of Anthropological Films*.

When

Wednesday, 30 November, 2022

4.30pm – 6.30pm

Where

SG.16 Samuel Alexander
Building
University of Manchester

More information

<https://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/social-anthropology/connect/events/>