

**Graduate School of Global Studies, Sophia University**  
**Symposium and Workshop Series 2021-22**

**Symposium Report**

**Date and Time:** 9:00 am to 13:10 pm, Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Place:** Online Format, via Zoom

**Title:** Beyond Human Space – Reinterpretation of Tradition under the Global ‘New Normal’

Title of each presentation, presenter’s name & affiliation

1. Munia Hweidi, PhD Candidate, Sophia University

**“A world of ‘re’ – Reinterpretation, Rediscovery, and Reappreciation of Nature and Tradition in Ishimure Michiko’s *Lake of Heaven*”**

2. Valentina Giammaria, PhD Candidate, Sophia University

**“Reinterpretation of Spaces: The Yoshiwara and Shinjuku Kabukichō, a Literary Exploration of the Pleasure Quarters of the Past and of the New Normal”**

3. Alexandra Humes-Yoneyama, PhD Candidate, Sophia University

**“Pick a Card and Tell me Your Worries”—Japanese Divination as a Source of Non-Religious Spiritual Counseling**

4. Andrea Boccardi, PhD Candidate, University of Leeds

**“Voices of Protest in a Pandemic: A Postcolonial Perspective on US Military Bases as a Source of Contagion”**

Title of keynote speech, speaker’s name & affiliation

Dr. Alisa Freedman, Professor of Japanese Literature, Cultural Studies, and Gender

**“Marketing Marie Kondo: Gender, Space, and Media”**

Commentators:

Dr. Angela Yiu, Professor of Literature, Sophia University

Dr. Tatsuo Murakami, Professor of Religion, Sophia University

**Report**

This symposium examined how “traditional” spaces are reinterpreted to fit our new normal. We focused on how transcendent spaces – natural, spiritual, and physical – have acquired independent identities during the pandemic. How has the concept of spirituality evolved in a world of “together alone”? How do we look at nature in a world of “nature as refuge”? How do we redefine cities and public spaces under the lens of the “new normal”?

The symposium began with a keynote speech by Dr. Alisa Freedman who contextualized and discussed the reception of Marie Kondo locally and internationally. She demonstrated how the initial reception was perceived and how it transformed after the KonMari model created its own niche within the reality TV market. Moreover, she traced how language, culture, and stereotypical perceptions changed with the evolution of the model, and how, with the advent of COVID-19, people's views and interactions with their own spaces changed along their perception of Marie Kondo's brand.

The talk was followed by the first round of presentations with a focus on literature. Hweidi's presentation discussed how under the current global environmental awareness, Ishimure Michiko's call towards a rediscovery of past traditions through nature as a means of understanding the present and building the future gains a renewed impact. The discovery of a world that has always been there gives a sense of renewed self and purpose, something that has become pivotal in the age of unprecedented digital connection and personal isolation. Giammaria examined how the Yoshiwara licensed pleasure quarter is described in Edo period's literary works in order to provide a historical thread connecting the traditional view of the quarter and new values revolving around today's Tokyo's pleasure spaces, namely Shinjuku-Kabukichō, and how the advent of the pandemic has re-proposed some of the old meanings and values.

Dr. Yiu responded by questioning the use of space and place in Ishimure Michiko's works within the scope of this reinterpretation as well as the presentation of religious and spiritual aspects within Ishimure's works in the context of nature and the 'new normal'. Dr. Yiu also suggested that sacred spaces and spaces dedicated to entertainment in Edo Japan were not only physically close but also characterized by a sort of fluidity between them, to the extent that the binary sacred-profane itself is less significant and less intriguing than the blurring border between the two.

The second round of presentations focused on religious and political studies. Humes-Yoneyama discussed how *uranai* (divination) methods are being combined with New Age spirituality and other traditional Japanese religious rituals, and how *uranaishi* (fortune tellers) are redefining themselves and providing supposedly nonreligious services and rituals online for individuals in need of spiritual counseling and healing during the past year and a half. Boccardi presented on how the pandemic redefined once again the power relationship between Okinawans, the Japanese central government, and the United States. By analyzing the political commentary of activists and intellectuals involved in the anti-base movements, he explored how meanings and values attached to spaces of protests and military occupation are reassessed and reinterpreted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Murakami provided feedback first to Humes-Yoneyama referring to Ann Taves' idea of "experiences deemed religious." He supported her adoption of this theoretical construct to examine ambiguous concepts like "religious" and "spiritual" in the context of Japanese culture and as a basis for her analysis of *uranaishi* and *uranai*. Commenting on Boccardi's presentation, Dr. Murakami focused on the idea of the "system of sacrifice" discussed in connection with the unequal relationship between Okinawa and mainland Japan. He argued that "sacrifice" can also be understood in a positive light, reversing the hierarchical positions of Okinawa and Japan and highlighting the sense of 'indebtedness' that Japanese mainlanders should feel towards Okinawa, which would reinforce their mutual understanding.

The symposium provided the platform for a lively discussion regarding how these spaces, works, and issues are perceived within the context of a new normal allowing the

scholars a deeper and more diverse understanding of their research topics. Supportive and helpful insights and thoughtful comments were generously forthcoming by the Keynote speaker, both commentators, and several of the audience members, lending encouragement for deeper and more nuanced reflections and further discussions of each of the presented topics.