

AFFECTIVE LABOR AMONG THE USED BOOKSELLERS OF JIMBOCHO:

An ethnography of markets and auctions

January 30th, 2021 / 19:00 (JST) / @ Zoom

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Susan Paige Taylor



Jimbocho, a Tokyo neighborhood of bookstores since the Meiji period, “still exists” (*mada nokotteiru*) as cluster of book related industries, a modern trade street in an increasingly post-modern, post-industrial city. This social anthropology dissertation focuses on the cultures of circulation of the material-textual past in this marketplace for used, old and antiquarian books in Jimbocho, and how this trade gives rise to retellings of Japanese history, by looking at this key milieu where collections are built and broken. This chapter focuses on Jimbocho’s markets and auctions, asking what this intellectual elite – its literary culture (Paulson 2001) - do with and through the market for old books. I explore how this marketplace links cultural capital, the materiality of texts, and (masculine) nostalgia for place, and how these concepts are being transformed by a changing media landscape and economic uncertainty,

especially due to the COVID crisis. In this chapter, I provide ethnographic sketches of a few bookstores and their markets, the *Chuo Ichi* (The Central Market) of the *Koshokumiai* (Tokyo Association of Dealers in Old Books or TADOB) where booksellers sell amongst themselves, and the *sokubaikai* (the weekend bargain sales). In order to theorize this labor of circulation, I draw on Arendt’s theory of the distinctions between work, labor, action (Arendt 1958/2018) and recent work on affective labor (Muehlebach 2011) (Hardt 1999) and especially affective labor within media industries (Siapera 2019) (Cantillon and Baker 2019) (Gershon and Deuze 2019) to theorize this careful circulation of material culture, which is not productive but which rearranges and maintains, which offers again the old rather than producing anew. While these bookstores cater to niche markets (cinema, war memorabilia, or the art market), they are intimate marketplaces of deep social relationships between booksellers and regular customers, and I argue that they provide an old example of a knowledge and creative economy as well as an example of a resilient anti-hegemonic media market.

Susan Paige Taylor is a PhD Candidate in the Anthropology Department at Harvard University. Her dissertation research focuses on the used bookstore neighborhood of Jimbocho, Tokyo, where she explores questions regarding

the care for material culture, marketplaces and auctions, and affective labor. Taylor was a 2019 Japan Foundation Fellow and has received a Supplementary Dissertation Research Grant from the Reischauer Institute at Harvard University. She graduated from Georgetown University with a BA in Japanese language and culture, and from the University of Tokyo with an MA in Interdisciplinary Information Studies. Taylor is also an amateur photographer.

(Jimbocho bookstore photo by the speaker)

Open to all, Free of charge, English with no translation

This talk is organized by David H. SLATER (Professor, FLA)

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