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Revitalizing rural Japan through crafts

A virtual *u:japan* lecture by Cornelia Reiher

Thursday
2021-06-17
18:30~20:00
online



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National revitalization programs and policies for rural areas in Japan are based on the concept of homogenous and single-issued local identities. This approach has proved to be inapt to fight regional inequality, economic decline in rural areas and related problems such as depopulation and aging. Nevertheless, revitalization strategies in rural Japan

national Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. This title comes with privileges, but also constrains creativity and excludes new and innovative actors. In my presentation, I compare two towns in rural Kyūshū and their different approaches to “traditional” crafts and art in their revitalization strategies to discuss how cultural heritage in the realm of crafts can enable or



Cornelia Reiher is professor of Japanese Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and vice director of the Graduate School of East Asian Studies. Her main research interests include rural Japan, food studies, globalization and science and technology studies.

Her recent publications include a special issue on fieldwork in Japan (2018), book chapters on transnational protest movement(s) in Asia (2019), and urban-rural migration in Japan (2020) and the methods handbook *Studying Japan: Handbook of research designs, fieldwork and methods* (2020, co-edited with Nora Kottmann).

often reduce local complexity to one or two features/products. These features can be “traditional” crafts like pottery, lacquer ware, Japanese paper (*washi*) or textiles. Japanese crafts are admired for their high quality and those preserving traditional crafts techniques are designated bearers of intangible cultural property (or “living national treasures”) under the

constrain rural revitalization in Japan. While Arita (Saga Prefecture) is famous for its 400 years of porcelain production and home of several “living national treasures”, Taketa (Ōita Prefecture) has no acknowledged crafts tradition. However, the town’s mayor is inviting urbanites with new ideas for the revitalization/establishment of a local crafts tradition in order to attract

tourists and to revitalize the local economy. The emerging hybrid forms of “traditional” crafts in both cases will shed light on the power relations between national and local policymakers, craftsmen and the institutions shaping and preserving cultural heritage and “traditional” crafts in Japan.

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