

## Society for East Asian Anthropology

CAROLYN S STEVENS AND CHRISTINE R YANO,  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Greetings from the Pacific (Hawai'i and Australia)! Beginning with this column, we will be featuring excerpts of conversations between senior East Asia scholars and graduate students. If anyone has suggestions for future pairings, please do let us know.

### Conversation with Takie Lebra

Here then is our first, a conversation between Takie Lebra and Satomi Fukutomi held on May 20, 2005, at Lebra's condominium that overlooks Diamond Head.

**Satomi Fukutomi:** Can you tell me how you got started in academia?

**Takie Lebra:** While I was in Gakushuin [school], I was totally absorbed in political movements. And I had no idea about becoming a scholar. I never thought about that. But I wanted to do something different from most women. It wasn't very clear what, because there were no models. But I knew that I wouldn't be happy as a typical married woman, especially with women's roles in Japan. So I tried to go to graduate school in Japan, just to get more education. But that was absolutely disappointing. First of all, faculty did not consider female students seriously, even at the graduate level. They felt they were wasting time.

**SF:** Were there any female faculty members?

**TL:** In my day ... no females.

**SF:** So why did you choose to study sociology at University of Pittsburgh?

**TL:** First, I was enrolled in political science. In the meantime sociology was doing something fantastic. They imported European sociologists, theorists. They were all theoretically oriented. I was thrilled, and audited classes. That was my conversion [from political science to sociology]. This is what I wanted. This is a real *gakumon* [education]! Until then, I wasn't quite sure whether I wanted to be a politician or journalist. But this exposure to sociological theories made me change suddenly. And, I thought I wanted to be a theorist. I wanted to be a universalist. That's why I shifted to sociology, and got my PhD in sociology.

**SF:** And, you eventually taught anthropology?

**TL:** Yes, that's right. I got a PhD in sociology, but there was no job. In the meantime, I married a guy [William Lebra] in Hawaii. But nobody wanted me at Hawaii.

**SF:** Did he have a sociology degree?



Takie Lebra (L), interviewed by Satomi Fukutomi (R).

**TL:** No, anthropology. And we really argued a lot ... you know, which [subject] was better. At that time, I was really convinced that sociological general theory was superior to anthropology. It was because anthropology was interested in particular societies while I was interested in the universal. So we argued a lot. In the meantime, the chair of the anthropology department asked, "Why don't you teach [about] Japan in anthropology?" Anthropology! If I had any choice, I would not have taken it! But, there was no choice, and I grabbed it. I had no idea what anthropology was. So, I studied like hell. I read anthropological works, and then I found I was [impressed by anthropology]. Once my point of view changed, anthropology appeared fantastic. Absolutely! Details really attracted me, to which I had never paid attention to until then. You know, anthropological descriptions of how the room was, what the furniture was, what's on the table, and how people talk ... all these details sounded very attractive.

**SF:** Do you see any changes in studying the anthropology of Japan since the beginning of your career?

**TL:** Yes, well, it is good and bad. First of all, there was no real anthropology of Japan when I started my career. There was [John Embree's] *Suye Mura*; it was regarded as the first one. But anthropology of Japan was not popular at all.

**SF:** Until [Ruth] Benedict?

**TL:** Yes, Benedict. But actually, she is not a Japan specialist. Only after the war, cultural anthropology became established under American guidance. In a way, you know specialization began to develop. Now nobody can do anything on Japan as a whole. You have to specialize ...

**SF:** I see. So did your ideas of Japan change from the first book to the latest?

**TL:** Well ... I suppose if there is any change, I was more anti-Japan before and so much more critical about Japan than I am now. But, that doesn't mean

I was more distant from Japan. I was more attached to Japan. Now, I am more distant, and therefore I am more tolerant.



**SF:** I see. That is so interesting. Well, thank you. Thank you very much. I feel inspired and encouraged by our conversation!

Please send your contributions to this column to Carolyn Stevens at [css@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:css@unimelb.edu.au) or Christine Yano at [cryano@hawaii.edu](mailto:cryano@hawaii.edu).

## Society for Latin American Anthropology

BETH CONKLIN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### SLAA Events at the AAA Meeting

Is it time to rethink the concept of "Latin America?" How can our notion of Latin America take account of the region's close ties with the Caribbean and its many links and interactions with the people, cultures and economies of other continents? How do first-generation migrants and Latinos living in other parts of the world fit into our concept of Latin America? And if we reconceptualize Latin America in more global terms, what should this mean for our section's identity and activities? Should we rename our section Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology (SLACA)?

These questions will be the focus of discussion among SLAA members in a series of events at the upcoming AAA meeting in Washington DC November 30–December 4. On the evening of Thursday, December 1 (6:15–7:30 pm), our Conversation Across the Americas event will open the debate in a roundtable discussion with SLAA President Gabriela Vargas-Cetina and board members Ramona Perez and Beth Conklin. On Thursday evening (6:15–7:30 pm), Lynn Stephen (U Oregon) will deliver the SLAA keynote address. Her lecture, "On Reconceptualizing Latin America" will tackle these questions directly.

All SLAA members should plan to attend our Business Meeting, Friday, December 2 at 12:15–1:30 pm. We need your input on the question of changing our section's name and defining its future role and activities and the orientation of our flagship journal, the *JLAA*. On Saturday evening (7–8:30 pm), everyone is invited to socialize at a joint cash bar reception along with members of the Association of Latino and Latina Anthropologists.

In the academic program, SLAA is sponsoring three Invited Sessions: "Interconnected Latin America Under Change: Challenging Realities, Emerging Conceptual Paradigms, and Reaccentuating Culture and Power" (Wednesday 8–9:45 pm); "Approaching Globalized Latin America from a Fresh Glance" (Saturday 4–5:45 pm); and (with SMA) "Enduring Inequalities: Violence, Memory, Social Suffering and the Body in Contemporary Latin America" (Friday 8–11:00 am).

Please send contributing editor Beth Conklin ([beth.a.conklin@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:beth.a.conklin@vanderbilt.edu)) articles and news of interest to our membership.