

From the Guest Editors

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We are very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary East Asia* (Volume 12, Issue 2, September/October 2013). This issue, which focuses primarily on Japan, features both Japanese scholars and scholars whose main research interests focus on Japan. We are truly grateful to the editors of the *JCEA*, as well as the Society of Socio-Informatics (SSI Japan) for supporting and encouraging young Japan-related scholars to have their work published. In this endeavor, we had the solid support of Dr. Kaoru Endo, Vice-President of the SSI Japan and Professor at Gakushin University, Japan, who cooperated avidly with our project, contributed an invited paper to this issue.

In this introduction to the special issue, we would like to introduce our panel of guest editors, provide some background information as to how this guest issue came about, introduce the papers, and convey our gratitude to the people who helped produce this special issue.

First, I would like to introduce our four-person guest-editorial panel. Through a combination of luck and commitment to this project, our panel is uniquely balanced in terms of research interests, composition, and gender. Nevertheless, common themes among all co-editors include a passion for academic research as well as a commitment to nurturing and helping early-career researchers and promising scholars in Japan. Our editorial panel as well as the young researchers whose work is featured in this special issue are united in their intense interest in examining how the Internet has had an impact on Japanese society, as well as how Japanese society is expressed through various Internet channels and functions.

Our first guest editor is Kuniomi Shibata, an Associate Professor at Otsuma Women's University. Dr. Shibata has been active in information-technology research in Japan since the early 2000s. His interests focus primarily on the nexus of social-welfare needs and information technologies, including media literacy activities undertaken by various social groups in Japan. Dr. Shibata is also involved in academic research associations in Japan that promote the study of information technology and society. Leslie Tkach-Kawasaki, an Associate Professor at the University of Tsukuba, researches the use of the Internet by Japanese politicians and political parties during election and non-election periods. In addition,

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she has co-edited monographs and other publications in information-technology utilization in Japan. Dr. Tkach-Kawasaki also participates regularly in international and domestic academic organizations. Dr. Sayaka Matsumoto, Associate Professor at the Cyber University in Tokyo, investigates connections between cyber society and education, and her published papers include work examining cyberbullying, as well as its online and offline impact. Dr. Takanori Tamura, who lectures at Hosei University, is a specialist in Japanese religion and the Internet, as well as Japanese self-expression on the Internet through blogs and online communities. Dr. Tamura's research interests have also expanded to studying online and offline social responses to the March 2011 "triple disaster" in Japan comprising the earthquake, tsunami, and damage to the Fukushima Dai'ichi Nuclear Power Plant. We would like to extend our deep gratitude and thanks to these scholars who have worked very hard to oversee the production of this guest-edited issue.

The genesis of how this diverse array of scholars came together to make this special issue happen owes a great deal to the International Committee and the BJK Group of young researchers and scholars within SSI Japan as well as to the support of SSI Japan executive board members. As part of 2012 Annual Conference held at Gunma University, in Gunma Prefecture, Japan, the International Committee and the BJK Group held a pre-conference workshop on September 14, 2012 featuring research presentations by a select group of young Japanese and international scholars. *JCEA* Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Han Woo Park of YeungNam University, South Korea, was the guest speaker at this event. Our plans for this special issue of the *JCEA* developed from that fortuitous meeting and ensuing discussions with Dr. Park. We could not have this wonderful opportunity without his ongoing support and enthusiasm for our project over the course of the past year.

Once we concretely decided to undertake this project, our co-editor panel started work on scheduling the issue, promoting the call for papers, and selecting reviewers for the collected papers. We clearly stated in our call for papers that our main goal for this special issue was to feature the academic work of early-career researchers, including graduate students, post-doctoral students, and those who have just embarked upon their academic careers. We especially encouraged female researchers to submit papers, as we believe that their efforts should be more recognized in the field of socio-informatics in Japan.

Our efforts at publicizing the call for papers through the Internet and by word of mouth generated an amazing number of submissions from young-career researchers throughout Japan. In response to this intense competitive interest in the special issue, we carefully selected and approached many elite scholars in Japan to assist us in reviewing the submitted papers. The review process in itself was quite strict, yet fair and balanced. Dr. Park as well as the guest-editor panel set out rigorous standards for the papers. After reviewing the papers, the reviewers gave valuable comments in written form to all researchers who submitted papers. We are deeply appreciative of the time and effort of our elite cadre of

reviewers who took time from their busy teaching and research activities to thoroughly review the submitted papers and to provide productive comments to all authors.

The resulting three papers and research note that were selected for this special issue demonstrate the diversity of approaches to the information society in Japan. The invited paper by Dr. Kaoru Endo investigates the impact of the 2011 disaster in Japan on Japan's media landscape. During and as a result of the disaster, Japanese people witnessed major shifts in the ways in which they use media channels and their level of trust in media organizations. Dr. Endo describes these shifts and then discusses the short- and long-term implications for the mass media as well as Internet use in Japan.

Our next paper, authored by Dragana Lazic, a Ph.D. student at the University of Tsukuba, examines the 2011 disaster from the dual perspectives of news items published in foreign newspapers as well as interviews with Japanese and foreign journalists who covered the disaster during its most critical period. Her focus on the stories behind the news and the challenges in covering this major event reveal a great deal about the gathering and production process of news in Japan.

New approaches to haiku, an internationally renowned symbol of Japanese tradition and culture, are the central themes in Nami Ohi's contributed paper. By positioning haiku poetry in the context of Japanese society in early modern Japan at the turn of the 19th century, Dr. Ohi details the historical evolution of haiku as a communicative interplay involving haiku poets, haiku societies, and media channels for haiku in Japanese society. Her analysis illustrates the profound impact of haiku in Japan, as well as its situational position as a communicative medium.

Our final paper is a research note authored by Yoshihiro Kawano and Yuka Obu that discusses personal branding through social media. As the Internet use continues to spread through Japanese society, its practical utilization as a personal and professional communication means is becoming critically important. By describing their experiments with *Mentors*, a personal branding service developed through social media channels, Drs. Kawano and Obu show how online communication can become an enriching and valuable resource for young people in their search for self-identification and self-evaluation.

The final two papers in this issue were selected by the *JCEA*'s main editors. Although these two papers—Ke Jiang and George A. Bennett's examination of the *guanxi* network in China and Otto F. von Feigenblatt's consideration of an *emic* model in East Asian regionalism—do not specifically address issues in Japan, they highly complement the other papers. On the whole, all of the papers in this special issue illustrate various themes of diversity and congruence found within the dynamic media landscape of East Asia.

This special issue would not have been possible without the contributions and efforts of many people. Please allow us to deeply thank Dr. Han Woo Park and Dr. Christian Schafferer again for giving the guest editor panel the responsibility to produce this issue. We

truly appreciate their trust and guidance in our endeavors. We would also like to thank the SSI Japan academic association, its executive directors, as well as the BJK Group and International Committee within the association, for encouraging our efforts. We are grateful for their support of our common interests in promoting robust academic research in the impact of information technology in Japan, as well as encouraging young researchers. In particular, we would like to thank Dr. Kaoru Endo, Vice-President of SSI Japan, for providing her ongoing support and cooperation with our project.

Finally, we would like to briefly single out the individual contributions of our guest editors and their associates above and beyond their joint efforts in the planning and realization of this special issue. Dr. Kuniomi Shibata provided the vision for our project, as well as constant support. Despite a busy schedule, he gave his time freely and positively, and we all were heartened by his commitment. In addition to assessing all four papers in terms of writing style and clarity, Dr. Leslie Tkach-Kawasaki edited all of the final versions of each paper. We are appreciative of her many hours in front of the computer and her constructive comments and advice. Dr. Sayaka Matsumoto gave important guidance throughout our project and helped us to maintain our thematical focus. Her insights and ideas about the process of producing this special issue were educational and enriching to all of us. Dr. Takanori Tamura donated a great deal of time as well as technological expertise to administratively managing this project. Dr. Tamura kept us on track in a positive and encouraging manner, and was always available for consultation and guidance. His contribution to this project was immeasurable. Finally, we would like to thank Maximillian Epling, a graduate student at the University of Tokyo, who assisted us in proofreading.

In conclusion, we truly hope that our readers will enjoy and learn from the six papers presented in this guest-edited issue of the *JCEA*.