

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Method Talk *Social Science Study Group*



June 17, 2021, Thu, 6:30pm (JST)/June 16, Wed, 9pm (EDT)

## Worshipping the Kami at a Distance: World-Wide Shinto and the Global Pandemic

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While emic definitions of Shinto often describe the ritual tradition as the unique “indigenous faith of the Japanese people” and the sacred landscape of the Japanese archipelago, such claims are troubled by the growth of a “global Shinto.” The confluence of a number of Japanese actors’ strategies for repositioning the nation as being of global import over the last few decades—including the export of Japanese martial arts, the international circulation of Japanese popular culture products such as anime as a medium for soft power, spiritual tourism campaigns, and the “greening” of Japanese religions—have rendered Shinto not just legible, but also attractive and available to non-Japanese people around the world. Based on several years of multi-sited digital ethnographic research, in this presentation I will examine the development of transnational, digital Shinto communities (DSCs) on social media over the last twenty years. I will first introduce the activities of three Shinto priests and their shrines located in the mainland United States, giving particular attention to their innovative use of digital technologies and adaptation of ritual practices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will then explore transnational Shinto practitioners’ ritual and discursive practices to trace the ongoing glocalization of Shinto traditions and epistemologies. I will conclude with a reflection on the importance of digital ethnography as method in response to obstacles to traditional research during a global pandemic.

*Kaitlyn Ugoretz is a digital anthropologist of Japanese religions and PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Specializing in digital religion, globalization, and popular culture, she studies the development of transnational, digital Shinto communities. Her work is published in the Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions and the forthcoming New Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions. Kaitlyn also creates content on East Asian religions for the educational YouTube channels Religion For Breakfast (writer) and Eat Pray Anime (host).*

### About

The **DIJ Methods Talks** are part of the Social Science Study Group, a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences focusing on methods and methodological questions. The event is open to all.

### Online Presentation

**Registration** required via email to

[kottmann@diptokyo.org](mailto:kottmann@diptokyo.org) until June 16, 2021.

**Log in data** will be provided after registration.