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Fieldwork from Home?: COVID-19 and the Patchwork Future of Japan-Based Fieldwork Pedagogies

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Abstract
During the COVID-19 pandemic, entry to Japan was heavily restricted causing challenges to research and study opportunities. This extended exclusion from Japan has since emphasised questions about the way in which we approach Japanese Studies in the future, and the nature of academic field research more broadly. In this article, we explore these through an innovative digitised 'field trip from home' class that we ran for undergraduate students in 2020 as a replacement for in-country fieldwork. Based on these experiences we argue that, while digital approaches are not a replacement for classic field research, digital approaches to scholarship and pedagogy within Japanese studies and related subjects can help to enhance on-site physical field practices and their position in our subjects. We discuss our findings as an example of 'patchwork ethnography' through how pandemic-era teaching and research experiences have shone a spotlight on the necessity to rethink the possibilities for classic fieldwork within contemporary academia. As we move beyond the pandemic, we conclude that the future will require both the reopening of borders and the necessary resources to better support the development of both digital and in person fieldwork training.

Introduction

When the severity and rapid spread of COVID-19 became apparent in the spring of 2020, the Japanese government rapidly implemented strict travel restrictions in and out of the country to curb infections. Many of these restrictions remained in place for over two years, with the brief exception of the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympics in the summer of 2021. While most countries introduced new border control measures, Japan faced heavy international criticism in particular, as these restrictions inordinately targeted foreign nationals, irrespective of their existing or long-term family, business or study connections to Japan (McCurry, 2022). Well over 150,000 affected individuals are estimated to have been impacted (McCurry, 2022), forcing some families into involuntary separation (Kusakabe, 2022), preventing long-term foreign residents of Japan from returning home, and causing additional distress and insecurity to foreign individuals already resident in Japan (Slater, 2020; Wels, 2021). This was accompanied by a rise in domestic xenophobic

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attitudes in Japan (Wels, 2021), as the efficacy of border closures as a measure against the ongoing spread of the virus continued to be questioned (Siripala, 2022).

While criticism of these restrictions has understandably focused on the impact on people's lives in Japan, for scholars and students of Japanese Studies the government's adopted position and the atmosphere that it subsequently fostered socially, posed significant challenges too. As both Japanese research materials and Japan itself became suddenly inaccessible, concerns about Japan's international academic standing were raised (East Asia Forum Editorial Board, 2022). Professionals within Japanese Studies navigated these challenges in innovative ways, such as by Japan-based scholars supporting international colleagues by setting up an exchange system for accessing field sites, archives, materials, and research partners through intermediaries in Japan (Kopp, 2021). Other groups, such as students of Japanese Studies in overseas institutions, however, were completely excluded from exchange programmes in Japan; experiences that for students in language and culture-based degrees are essential for developing skills for their future careers (Yang, 2016). While the long-term effects of the pandemic on academic exchange and scholarship are still unfolding, the prolonged isolation from Japan has subsequently forced overseas scholars of Japan to rethink and reflect on the ways in which we have traditionally accessed and produced knowledge about Japan.

In this article, we focus on one of the most prominent ways in which both educators and researchers of Japan navigated and supplemented the physical exclusion to the country, namely through the adoption of digital means to facilitate contact with Japan and Japan-related materials. We base our discussion in this article on original research conducted at the University of Sheffield among a cohort of East Asian Studies students whose field research in Tokyo was cancelled due to the pandemic. In its stead, we developed a hybrid research class with a digital research component focusing on Tokyo, while simultaneously prompting students to engage with physical, sensory, and embodied methodologies through practice in their home environments. Interviews were later carried out with class participants after the conclusion of all assessment to better understand the pedagogical efficacy of our approach, as well as explore the broader potential and limitations of digital research approaches within Area Studies. Their responses are anonymised in our discussion below.[1]

The forced move to digitally facilitated access to research sites has reinvigorated pre-existing discussions within Area Studies, and related disciplines, around digital technologies (Miller and Horst, 2020; Sanjek & Tratner, 2016; Clement, 2016), and the difficulties and possibilities of engaging in traditional modes of long-term ethnographic fieldwork within contemporary academia (Faubion & Marcus, 2017; Günel et al., 2020; Rivoal & Salazar, 2013). We contribute to these debates in this article and argue that by better identifying the position and utility of digital approaches to scholarship and pedagogy within Area Studies, we can help to safeguard the importance of on-site physical field practices and their position as core means to understanding our subjects. In this article we will focus on two core utilities of digitally enhanced field research. Firstly, digital approaches can offer a 'slower' way of entering and exploring the field, thus helping to deepen cultural,

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[1]This research was approved by the University of Sheffield School of East Asian Studies Ethics Review Panel (application number 038227).

spatial, and sensory awareness of field sites, as well as support a more thorough acquisition of research skills. Secondly, for students as young scholars, digital approaches can help prepare them for the field by deepening awareness of their identities as field researchers and associated ethical demands when both on and off the field.

It is important to note that we do not advocate for digital approaches as a replacement for physical field research or want to undercut the importance of traditional field-based research practices in cultivating language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and long-term commitments and respect to field sites and subjects (Günel et al., 2020). Instead, we want to elaborate on our findings in the context and time of significant change in universities, the lives of our students and us as teachers and researchers, and the social and ecological contexts in which we operate (McCowan et al., 2021; Currie & Vidovich, 2009; Marginson, 2000), factors that necessitate a reconsideration of how knowledge is produced, and research skills developed. We position our experiences in teaching this class and the outcomes of our related research as a potential example of 'patchwork ethnography' and its teaching, an approach that has developed in response to the above challenges and their impact on traditional ethnographic practice today (Günel et al. 2020). As the authors of the 'Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography' state, the recombination of 'home' and 'field' sits at the heart of the 'patchwork' approach, arguing for innovation and fragmentation in the way we have traditionally conceptualised and approached the field, in order to update our notions and expectations of ethnographic praxis as more inclusive and befitting contemporary academic life (Günel et al., 2020). We posit that the experiences and learning gained from the pandemic-induced digital shift can support the emergence of a more embedded, but crucially, ethically appropriate and methodologically rigorous uptake of digital approaches. Digital technologies therefore can have a role to play in responding to the current needs and interests of our field by supporting, rather than compromising, the importance of 'being there'.

Fieldwork, Digital Methods, and Japan

While digital technologies and methodologies had been gaining ground prior to the pandemic, their uptake and utilisation within Area Studies, and particularly Japanese Studies remained uneven (Curtis, 2021; Hall, 2023). Within academia more broadly, discussions around the research and teaching potential of technological innovations in the digital sphere have also been taking place in greater numbers, with much of the digital drive advanced by scholars and practitioners keen to improve pedagogical practices (Sampson et al., 2018), but some also advocated by administrators looking for ways to drive down costs (Currie & Vidovich, 2009). While the COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid digitalisation drive, the growing urgency of climate change has also given rise to critical discussions about the use of digital tools to facilitate collaborations and contact between academics and their research partners and locations (Hall, 2023). As the digital comes to impact a wider array of teaching and research approaches, however, questions have been raised around what that means for fieldwork methodologies and a need to reconceptualise fieldwork, particularly in the sense of what it means to 'go' to the field (Hall, 2023). Some key areas of concern have been around how researchers can develop skills in data collection and an understanding of the field when 'not there', and how to

consider ethical issues around relationship building and potentials of marginalisation (Murthy, 2008; Thompson et al., 2021).

Such challenges are especially acute in fields like Japanese Studies where the development of socio-cultural and linguistic sensitivities will be difficult to achieve without the experience of being in Japan; these limitations can further impact relationships with local populations, research partners as well as researcher well-being (Hall, 2009). Area studies and other fields with linguistic components have for a long time engaged in distant language learning opportunities (Sato et al., 2015), and within Japanese Studies, digital humanities initiatives were also emerging already prior to the pandemic (Digital Humanities Japan, 2016; MIT Vizualizing Cultures, 2020). From a pedagogical perspective, existing evidence from fields such as geography also suggest that for students and young scholars, engaging in both on-site and remote fieldwork can result in equivalent outcomes of skills development (Stokes et al. 2012; Boyle et al., 2007), therefore making digital fieldwork opportunities a valid avenue to explore. However, while initiatives like these highlight the positive potential of digital technologies, the embodied and multi-sensory nature of on-site fieldwork as a way of exploring cultures and societies continues to sit at the heart of what characterises Area Studies both methodologically and epistemologically. How to address these core aspects of Area Studies in a digitised context has not been fully resolved (Sluka & Robben, 2007; Ito & Igano, 2021; Hoel, 2020).

Slowness of, and perhaps even scepticism toward, digital adoption is of course understandable for disciplines where ethnography sits at the heart of their praxis, and where through a Bourdieuan lens, the conceptualisation of the 'field' itself emerges from its embodied, sensory and relational characteristics (Kalir, 2006). Ethnographic field research constitutes more than observation, with some scholars referring to it as 'body-work' (Hoel, 2020), where the researcher's presence and interactions within a physical space play a role in the types of data and insights that can be generated (Sand et al., 2021). For most ethnographers, the importance of being physically present in the field relates to this embodied understanding not only of the place itself as multisensory but also by opening opportunities to interact with research participants in the settings of their daily lives (Sand et al., 2021); expose relationships between place, lived experience and communal life (Powell, 2010); and reveal threads of accountability and ethical questions embedded into research locations and relationships (Hoel, 2020). Experiences of 'being there' therefore highlight methodological and research skills, with physical fieldwork helping researchers gain a more nuanced understanding of traditional research methods such as interviewing and the types of knowledge that can be generated through it, while also helping to build the socio-cultural and linguistic sensitivities and capabilities that will enable in-depth and considered analyses (Chang & Ooi, 2008).

The adoption of digital technologies to explore a 'field' in Area Studies and related disciplines that are characterised through its socio-cultural and material characteristics can pose methodological and epistemological challenges, with on-site research arguably offering the richest and most obvious pathways to research. However, people's lives today are intensely digitised, where the embeddedness of smartphones and applications into daily life management, the impact of algorithms in decision-making (Cohen, 2018), and spatialisation of digital technology all direct people's behaviour, choices, and citizenship in space and interactions with one another (Lynch, 2020). This evolution in the digitalisation of people's lived reality means that it is pertinent that our conceptualisations of

'the field' come to reflect and account for this overwhelming presence of the digital in people's daily lives, interactions, and physical reality. Acceptance of 'the field' through its techno-material characteristics therefore illustrates the validity of digital tools and methods as part of the ethnographic toolkit, where digital fieldwork, even from a distance, can contribute to the understanding of the socio-political reality of peoples and cultures in important and novel ways (Postill, 2016), while also helping us reconceptualise the scholarly act of 'going' to the field.

'Going' to the field digitally however requires that spaces and societies are accessible through digital means. What the COVID-19 pandemic has done in an important way is to highlight the continued presence of historical digital divides along geographical, gender, class, and racial lines (Murthy, 2008). Even countries like Japan, despite advanced technological innovations, have remained remarkably analogue, continuing to compare negatively to similarly developed economies and struggle in terms of global digital competitiveness (Kyodo, 2022). In Japan, digital divides persist particularly between urban and rural areas (Nishida, Pick & Sarkar, 2014) and between generations (Aung et al., 2022). Access to field sites or research participants may therefore be limited depending on the focus of research, impacting the scope of what is possible to achieve through remote digital means within Japanese studies, or even become a barrier to it altogether.

However, the same crisis also accelerated a digitalisation drive in many areas, including Japan. While long-term researchers of Japan may remain sceptical, the last few years has seen a massive explosion of opportunities for learning and researching Japan digitally. Alongside the trend of increasing sophistication of image, sound, and video applications that have provided people with enhanced access to the sensory worlds of distant places, museums, archives, and research institutions too are now increasingly offering their content and collections to the public online, with a positive impact on access to these materials. In Japan, we have seen the emergence of the cross-platform Japan Search facility (https://jpsearch.go.jp/), as well as the launch of the Next Digital Library search functions at the National Diet Library (https://lab.ndl.go.jp/dl/), amongst many other such initiatives. Increasing numbers of museums, galleries and other cultural institutions in Japan also provide some access to collections and exhibitions – from major institutions such as the Edo-Tokyo museum, which hosts a digital 360 degree tour of its collections, a digital archive, and a YouTube channel, to small specialist institutions, such as the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace, which has made a number of their collections about the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal from 2000 available digitally. Equally, platforms like YouTube and NicoNico provide access to moving image materials generated both by commercial, public and independent producers, while specialist sites focusing on digital sound mapping and other data collection and preservations abound. Government goals to transition Japan towards a 'Society 5.0' that bridges cyberspace and physical space are also driving innovation in industry and elsewhere (Cabinet Office, 2023).

While digital ethnography cannot be a substitute for on-site field experiences, scholars such as Postill (2016) have emphasised that it can be a useful tool for ethnographers with previous local experience from their field sites. This is perhaps how digital approaches have been most utilised in the context of Japanese Studies, and Area Studies more broadly – as a supplement to pre-existing experience of living,

studying, and researching in Japan. However, it is worth asking whether digital ethnography or remote fieldwork could offer a preparatory tool for those entering the field for the first time. Previous studies carried out with doctoral students for instance have discovered that for a number of reasons, PhD candidates often found themselves unprepared for fieldwork, or experienced difficulties in the field that could potentially impact the quality and quantity of data and results they were able to gain (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011; Giles, Jackson & Stephen, 2020; Nelson, Rutherford, Hinde, & Clancy, 2017). Mental well-being and health and safety have also been known to suffer during physical field research periods (McSweeney & WinklerPrins, 2020). Digital explorations as a supplementary or preparatory mode of data collection could prove useful in addressing these issues.

Based on our engagement with participants in our class, most of whom had no pre-existing experience from Japan, digital fieldwork seemed to result in benefits to those who were exploring Japan for the first time and could potentially help to alleviate some of the above-mentioned challenges of physical fieldwork that may arise later. Coinciding with what the patchwork approach advocates (Günel et al. 2020), digital tools and methodologies can offer more temporally diverse and elongated points of access to data and individuals, while also providing researchers and students space and time to reflect on fieldwork sensitivities, ethical considerations, and their own preparedness for the intensity of on-site experiences.

We argue that despite its limitations, there is a role for digital and remote fieldwork in enhancing the study of Japan, and more broadly, in helping to draw attention to the growing diversity of ways in which field research can be carried out. As we will elaborate on below, despite the Japanese government's belated lifting of travel restrictions, for scholars and students of Japan, digital and remote tools can function to enrich the field and the scope of our interests and explorations of Japan and as a way of circumventing the limitations placed on researchers for a multitude of reasons. From a pedagogical perspective they can also function as an excellent preparatory tool to improve fieldwork experiences, whether long-term as is traditional, or the more patchwork style necessitated by COVID-19 that may become more common in the post-pandemic world.

Developing 'Fieldwork from Home'

The School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield has a six-decade history of research and teaching about East Asia, offering four undergraduate programmes – three language-intensive Bachelor of Arts degrees in Chinese, Japanese and Korean Studies, and a BA in East Asian Studies, which has a more generalist focus on learning about East Asia. Students on the country-specific programmes participate in a year abroad as a core component, however our East Asian studies course historically did not include an in-country option in East Asia, despite offering opportunities for language learning. Over the years concerns have been raised internally about the differential outcomes and limited 'on the ground' knowledge of East Asia among our East Asian Studies graduates. To remedy this, a series of localised research projects and consultations with students was initiated by Dr Pendleton (one of the authors of this article) in 2017, carried out as part of a process designed to recognise teaching accomplishments under the UK Professional

Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (AdvanceHE 2019).

The fieldwork class emerged as a response to these concerns, by providing students in our East Asian Studies programme an experience of undertaking research and being able to show a grounded understanding of fieldwork methodologies in an East Asian field context. This class was launched in the academic year 2019–2020, with the first students due to travel to Tokyo in March 2020; this was subsequently cancelled due to the onset of the pandemic. When it became clear that travelling to Japan would still not be possible by spring 2021, a wholesale redesign was initiated to provide not only a deliverable and pedagogically rigorous module, but one that would also develop the skills associated with 'going' to the field as much as possible. At this point we also tried to the best of our abilities to anticipate the impact of social isolation, negative mental health and well-being outcomes and long-term financial difficulties that we now know to have resulted from the pandemic (Cullen et al., 2020; Hussong et al., 2021), by providing structured activities and engagement with the embodied elements of field-based research to prevent our module becoming solely screen focused. It was from this basic premise that we began to build up a class we came to call a 'field trip from home'.

Our key priorities for the curriculum redesign were that the class would be as interactive and skills-focused as possible and engage with Tokyo as a field site through a multitude of lenses. In the process of development, we explored the use of digital tools in field research and teaching (Góralska 2020; Horst et al., 2015; Locke, 2017) that helped us direct the module's development toward a hybrid format, combining physical exercises in the students' home locations, both in and outside of the UK, and our digital field site of Tokyo. Through this hybrid format we wanted to ensure the integration of elements and core learning points from classical on-site ethnography as 'bodywork' as dubbed by Hoel (2020). Drawing on the work of Sarah Pink (2015) on sensory methodologies as well as work on embodiment in field-based research (Monaghan, 2006; Thanem & Knights, 2019; Ellingson, 2017), we focused on developing a module that would work within the demands of pandemic-induced teaching restrictions, but also offered a potential model for future embedding of digital methodologies into how we approach Japan as a subject of our teaching as well as research.

The reworked module ultimately consisted of ten blocks of content, the focal points of which ranged from exploring the historical development of Tokyo, the use of sight, sound, and taste as part of fieldwork experiences, to systems of mobility and recreation and much more. Within the ten-week schedule, students engaged with recorded videos online, explored core academic readings and other resources such as virtual museum tours, television programmes, films, books and so on, and carried out a weekly research skills-focused task before a synchronous seminar session towards the end of the week that helped tie the theoretical and conceptual work to the practical skills under development. Responses to weekly tasks were uploaded onto a discussion board on the course site which all participants could access.

The limited possibilities of digital technologies to simulate the bodily and sensory aspects of 'bodywork' in physical field sites remains one of the key challenges of remote and digital field research methodologies (Postill, 2016). As a result, we needed to approach the sensory aspects of field research differently, not as immersive and

overlapping sensory inputs as would be experienced in the field, but rather as a compartmentalised and more conservatively pedagogical exercise. To counterbalance this reliance on more classical methods training, the weekly tasks students engaged in as part of the module were designed to emphasise embodied practice, and move students away from their desks and into their kitchens, backyards, and communities to make observations 'in the field' and produce analytical reflections of these experiences.

In one week, students explored the character and evolution of Japanese cuisine by preparing a meal from Tim Anderson's *Tokyo Stories* cookbook, and in dialogue with the chef and author himself reflected on the aesthetics of food preparation and presentation, culturalised notions of taste, as well as food waste. Concretely, students were provided with a small budget to acquire ingredients to cook their chosen dish from the cookbook, while also asked to document the cooking process and present it in a manner of their choosing. Students presented their cooking experiment in the form of posters, video diaries, drawings, and blog posts where they reflected on the process from sensory and practical perspectives in reference to the academic reading materials.

In other weeks, students analysed themes of mobility, transportation, and management of public space in Japan through digital maps and video platforms, simultaneously learning about how history, culture, and organisation of communal life impacts socio-material conditions of locations and our interactions with them. We also exposed them to the variety of ways in which field notes can be recorded and their role in research (Sanjek, 1990), utilising the fantastic work carried out on the website Illustrating Anthropology (Haapio-Kirk & Cearns, 2020). While the above examples still do not equate to 'going' to the field, the benefit of these exercises was that students were able to more consciously and deliberately reflect on broader issues that define field sites, such as diversity, mobility, food cultures and local history; aspects that can often get pushed to the 'background' during the more narrowly defined focus of physical field research carried out as part of specific research projects.

We also focused on introducing different methodological approaches to field-based research, such as sound mapping and field recording. This draws on both scholarly (for example, Chenhall, Kohn & Stevens, 2021) and popular engagements with sound in Tokyo, such as the work of radio producer Nick Luscombe and various online sound mapping and field recording websites, supporting the fantastic emerging scholarship on sound in the Japanese Studies sphere (Smith, 2021; Littlejohn, 2020).

Making learning fun was also a key factor in our teaching choices as well, taking into consideration the disappointment of not being able to go to Tokyo and the challenges of lockdown life, while enabling students to explore new ways of both learning and presenting knowledge that drew on their own specific interests in East Asia, and their own social and geographical position. As their final assessment we asked students to produce an artefact of their choosing that would be showcased in a virtual exhibition, along with a short, written exegesis that connected their artefact to scholarly writing on their chosen topic. This mode of assessment was particularly inspired by the work of Dr Meredith Warren, a colleague in Sheffield's School of English, and her work on the creative pedagogical practice around 'unessays' in assessment – a practice that has been growing in popularity as an alternative mode of assessment across several fields over the last decade (O'Donnell, 2012; Sullivan, 2015; Wood & Stringham, 2022). Emerging from developments in the humanities that sought to undercut debates over canonicity

(Ramsay, 2014) and the structural forms that have shaped the production and consumption of knowledge, such as the academic conference, the unessay similarly challenges educators to consider the forms of knowledge production that we model to and expect from students, as well as the limitations of restricting ourselves to these forms. In freeing ourselves from narrow views of what constitutes appropriate assessment, creative assignments like unessays provide potential openings for new insights in how knowledge is engaged with by students as learners and produced and disseminated by students as emerging researchers.

The class was well liked by the participants, with subsequent student feedback providing valuable insights on how to make learning more dynamic, how to design more meaningful and impactful assessments, and how to cater for students with differing learning styles. Due to the nature of the module and the times in which it was delivered, we wanted to better understand the potential of digital and remote methodologies, not only for teaching but for ethnography within Japanese Studies and related disciplines. As a result, we also carried out semi-structured interviews with seven participants in the module after their results were finalised. Below we elaborate on this material by focusing on two specific observations we made that can offer new avenues for the patchwork ways of approaching field sites, both as research and pedagogical exercises: firstly, how digital and remote methodologies can help in slowing down the research process and support its continuity and consistency; and secondly how they can deepen the reflexiveness around researcher positionality and help develop respectful and nuanced relationships between people and place.

Encountering the Field Differently

> You can't just go there knowing nothing, expecting to learn everything out in the field. (Sian)

In its typical form, fieldwork is a practical pursuit that is temporally and physically demarcated and driven by the needs of data collection (Macaulay, 2004), often making it lengthy and site-bound, both in practice and in our imaginations of it. In this form, the empirical nature of observing by being in and interacting with the field in person becomes emphasised as the core tenet of field-based research, and therefore also of training. However, fieldwork does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, intensive periods of physical field research are part of broader processes of planning, preparation, and analysis, driven by theoretical, methodological, and practical considerations both on and off the field. Changing circumstances, and the material condition in which researchers operate, suggest a need to reconceptualise both what travel to the field looks like and the timing and duration of ethnographic work, as the authors of the patchwork ethnography manifesto suggest. While the pandemic showed us what can be lost in terms of ethnographic insight due to emergency restrictions, this period has simultaneously opened new avenues for reconceptualising and accessing the field, and the utility of this diversification for pedagogical and research outputs.

With this in mind, in designing our 'field trip from home' module, our goal was not to develop a mere emergency replacement, but a complete learning experience with a focus on what can be gained from digital and remote approaches rather than what they lack,

and the positive impact this can have on promoting ethnographic praxis as a diverse and dynamic pursuit both in and outside of 'being there'. The internet, and the digital sphere more broadly, is not famed for its slowness or information accuracy. However, these were precisely the two issues that participants in our module identified as specific benefits of exploring Tokyo digitally. Firstly, exploring Tokyo remotely through digital means was found to slow down the observational process and enable more attention to detail. And secondly, the digital approach helped participants carry out more considered and nuanced research and break down rather than reinforce stereotypes, misconceptions and pre-existing assumptions about Japan that remain regrettably abundant in popular media to this day (Nozaki, 2009; Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005).

Despite our initial concerns around Japan's famously slow adoption of digital information technologies (Mito, Tsuchiya & Sano, 2013), Tokyo as a remote field site offered great digital access with students being able to explore digital exhibitions of museums and galleries, sound mapping projects, digitised archival collections, transport system maps, tracking websites, and fan communities, civil society organisations, and much more. The richness of the digital field related to Tokyo also allowed students to see the field site as an integrated whole, while enabling participants to direct their research projects based on their own interests and build on existing strengths with new knowledge and skills. Oliver illustrated this by saying that 'we could look at everything [. . .] also at a bigger scale, like transport and being able to see Tokyo as a whole'. While being able to see the 'bigger picture', others also reported that the digital environment simultaneously made it easier to focus on specific phenomena and categorise information and observations more easily, thus helping to take a 'slower approach to the city', as Maria expressed it.

This slower and more evenly paced nature of the 'field trip from home' also enabled some students to report a more multifaceted understanding of social phenomena. Ellie elaborated on this point by explaining how the slower and more in-depth digital approach helped her understand the purposefulness and logic of place designs, the cityscape, the lived environment, and social behaviours as they appeared in the field. She was particularly referring to a week when we explored the pocket parks and street side flowerpot gardens that are abundant in the Tokyo streetscape (Jonas, 2007). Ellie suggested that this was something that she would have probably noticed but disregarded as just a 'random and different' element in comparison to her own familiar reality in the UK. Remote digital field research enabled her to be 'more aware and mindful of the environment' and develop more deliberate and considered modes of observation. For Ellie, this suggested a new orientation to space that she wanted to take forward, should she go on to do physical field research.

Looking at Tokyo in a slower, more deliberate manner and through the multitude of representations that the digital enables, illustrates how a patchwork approach can elongate and diversify the opportunities for students and researchers to explore places and people in a more considered manner. Compared to the multi-sensory and participatory fieldwork environment, where senses work simultaneously, potentially challenging focus and concentration, Chris noted how the digital approach allowed him to 'look into things in a lot more detail and with perhaps more accuracy as well, as you would be looking up multiple sources for what you found'. This is particularly pertinent within Japanese Studies where the influence of orientalism and stereotypical imagery presented

in the media and a great deal of digital content still pose challenges for teaching and research about Japan (Nozaki, 2009; Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005). Breaking stereotypes was another positive effect that emerged from what the participants termed as a 'slower' approach, with Sian commenting on how it helped her to 'humanise and make Japan seem more real'. She elaborated on this by explaining how Japan is often presented like a 'fantasy land in some people's minds, like they think they're going to the moon. But it's actually just filled with people who are just busy. It's a city, it's noisy, it's loud. It's smelly sometimes. It's not a utopia'.

In the Anglophone world, popular media products about social or cultural phenomena in East Asia frequently reproduce stereotypical tropes (Hayes, 2019). Exploring and breaking down these often racially driven misconceptions (Hayes, 2019) was something that many participants picked up as a key learning point from the course, and was illustrated in their final unessays. Maria, for instance, described how she had internalised without thinking the popular notion of Japan as a homogenous nation (Sugimoto, 2020[1997]). However, by exploring multiculturalism and minority communities in Japan (Burgess, 2008), her own research output was able to challenge not only her own perceptions of Japan's social realities, but also produce original research that challenges the persistent notions of homogeneity:

> I knew that subcultures existed, but it was always the Lolitas and stuff like that. Always the really flashy stuff. But with this module and my own research, I realised there were other specific minority voices too.

Maria researched Tokyo's ethnic communities through a multitude of digital means, commenting on how the module enabled her to both explore different types of knowledge and materials, while also giving her the flexibility to showcase her own research in a 'non-typical' way: 'Engaging with knowledge seemed easier, because in our research outputs we had to show how the knowledge we acquired was actually different'.

To enable this developing critical awareness, we encouraged students to explore a vast array of material, including newspapers, museum collections, YouTube videos, movies, novels, blogs, Facebook groups, and other social media, alongside traditional academic texts. This allowed students to understand the multiple ways in which the field presents itself while also helping them understand the power of digital media and technologies in offering novel avenues for self-expression and information circulation (Poletti & Rak, 2014). By broadening the array of materials to explore, we encouraged students to also develop skills in interpretation of materials, objects, and phenomena, both at the point of observation and through assessment. The academic material in the case of our module played a supporting role in demonstrating how interpretation and analysis could work, with students encouraged to test various approaches they encountered through scholarly readings with the other materials they were exposed to. Maria wanted to showcase the diversity of Tokyo she had encountered through these various forms, ultimately settling on music as a key medium to represent that in her final assessment. This involved a playlist of pop songs from cultures and societies whose people have migrated to Tokyo, connected to scholarly work on sound and music cultures in Tokyo and beyond.

Diversifying the learning materials that students were encouraged to utilise served this objective of interpretation, while also better reflecting the diversity of contemporary information consumption (Perrin, 2015). Teaching students to critically interpret media products they encounter in their daily lives helped them produce popular media products

themselves that aimed to avoid stereotypical representations, with students developing YouTube videos, short video games and more. Developing the students' capacity to challenge existing narratives about Japan was not only theoretically useful, but also has an ethical drive in guiding students toward developing a 'more mature' image of Tokyo and Japan, in the words of Ellie, that may be useful in their future careers.

Some students expressed concerns about how to conduct independent research like this, often for the first time, with these worries enhanced by the physical and psychological distance from the classroom that the pandemic created. Lucy, for example, noted that since the activities during the module were self-directed and diverged from the more traditional academic work they had been used to, some students found the module initially quite stressful. However, flexibility in engagement built into the module as a necessity during the pandemic, along with scaffolding of module content and assessment tasks, helped build the confidence of students as emerging independent researchers.

Becoming a Researcher

> You miss your senses working together and with the environment. The experience of being there, with your thoughts being different and how you would see things differently when in that environment physically. (Maria)

Ethnography is both an 'academic specialty and an applied skill' (Fine and Hancock, 2017), embodied in the title of a 'researcher'; a self-identification that our undergraduate participants began to increasingly adopt in reference to themselves and in seeing their own activities as a form of academic scholarship. The participants' identification of themselves with this title reflected increased confidence in their ability to assess and analyse observations and interpret them in the light of existing knowledge, and to understand the nature, operation, and dynamics of the field itself, as well as the role of the researcher as both an observer and participant in the field. By conceptualising their studies as a form of academic research, the participants also began to identify themselves with scholars, who could bring a maturing interpretive eye to their observations of the field and understand that academic analyses are not pure representations of the field, but rather their own interpretations of observed phenomena (Ingold, 2018) (See Figure 1). Sian's account of the process of creating a manga about Tokyo's soundscapes through onomatopoeia and Japanese *gitai-go* (mimetic words) reflects these notions of interpretation and academic community well:

> Being exposed to sound-focused sensory research then reading Plourde's (2013: 160) observation that Tokyo is a 'sound saturated society', I knew what I wanted to focus on. There exists in Japan a deeper cultural awareness and appreciation of noise and sound that is not understood in the West. Polly Barton (2021: 20) agrees that there exists a set of invisible basics of onomatopoeic terms that are fundamental to society yet often overlooked. Barton's book acted as the catalyst for my project's idea since I have long been a manga reader that often overlooks its unfamiliar and untranslated sound effects (SFX), Barton's impassioned argument for the importance of these words revealed to me their value. With my new understanding I wanted to create a manga that would highlight the importance of sound and raise awareness of this hidden language. (Sian)

The maturing reflexiveness of the students was not only apparent in the more nuanced nature of the students' work and the ensuing discussions, but also in the transparency of

Figure 1. Sheffield student Sian's 'fieldwork from home' unessay exploring soundscapes in contemporary Tokyo.

their understanding of the researcher's positionality and its inherent impact on the people, sites, and phenomena under observation (Ingold, 2018). Pure observation as part of an ethnographic approach today is a rarity, with typical ethnographic work consisting of a great deal of participatory elements (Postill, 2016). When it comes to digital and remote fieldwork, interactions with the field can represent a challenge. Interaction and embeddedness into the field are also parts of the process that most ethnographers, like the participants in our module, reflected on as potentially the most insightful and enjoyable parts of physical field research. 'Being around strangers in a very busy place, or a quiet place, and being in that language environment is something that isn't going to be translated very well digitally', Ellie explained, reflecting on her inability to interact with the people and spaces in Tokyo and how their in-situ observation impacts interpretation of phenomena. 'You're not part of the environment, a variable in the field yourself', she continued.

As noted above, we encouraged the exploration of multiple ways of accessing the field in the digital environment, but helping participants understand the embodied nature of fieldwork was a challenge in a purely digital environment. Our attempted solution was to offer a 'patchwork' of sensory experiences ranging from listening to field recordings, exploring tastes and smells through cooking, and mapping the visual landscape of Tokyo through films and television shows. While students reported that

such practical tasks were stimulating to their learning, leading to deeper understanding of the intersection between the researcher and the socio-material world they were exploring, they were also aware that this could never capture the entirety of 'being there'. Ellie for instance noted how the sensory nature of the field was 'difficult to interpret and research because there were so many things that you couldn't control or replicate like temperature or feel the heat and climate changes', things that she felt were 'locked in the landscape' of the physical space. Similarly, Maria explained how for her 'what might be missed is seeing and experiencing stuff with all your senses together', something that she felt would influence the way the environment and the interactions and observations within it would be experienced: 'your thoughts and how you see things would be different'.

As keenly observed by the participants, remote fieldwork does not help to facilitate field research as 'bodywork', with the field being holistically sensed and absorbed through the body. While 'not being there' is certainly a barrier in remote field research, we wanted students to nonetheless use their bodies to understand the physicality of field research by asking them to make observations of their actual physical surroundings focusing on touch, smell, and sound, and to draw these into dialogue with the digital materials and critical reflections of Tokyo. Through these embodied exercises students began to develop an awareness around the multitude of practical, analytical, and ethical challenges that fieldwork poses for researchers. While acutely aware of the limitations of the digital-only approach, students nonetheless felt that there was something of value gained from doing 'something different', as Oliver put it above. The patchwork of methods and ways of exploring the field were created as a necessity in response to the pandemic, but nonetheless reflected the field in its complexity, and illustrated the multiple ways in which we access and encounter the field in real life.

While the above comments point to the obvious weaknesses of digital and remote field research, the observations the students made about the digital approach and remote research processes nonetheless speak volumes about their development as researchers and methodological and epistemological understanding of the value of field research and ethnography as an approach to understanding people and places. They expressed a keen understanding of the static nature of the '2D world' online, as Maria put it, that cannot capture the socio-psychological complexities of human and spatial interactions in the physical world; or provide opportunities to experience the inherent uncertainties embedded in ethnographic fieldwork (Rivoal & Salazar, 2013), with Sian reflecting on the impossibility of the digital approach to recreate the 'spontaneity of being in the field'.

Despite the drawbacks of the digital approach, students recognised research as a process that takes a variety of shapes and forms and noted that a direct comparison between digital and physical may not be fully fair. 'It [digital/remote fieldwork] is something completely different', Oliver noted, explaining how shifting his mind-set in this way made the whole experience much more meaningful for him and gave his own research a great deal of value and helped him position himself more realistically in relation to the field site and his own research goals. From a pedagogical perspective, digitally enhanced remote field research has the potential to function as an effective and powerful pedagogical tool in teaching research methodologies, ethical and meaningful engagement with the field, and helping young scholars position themselves in relation to their field sites (Caretta &

Jokinen, 2017). This slow scaffolding approach offered by digital methodologies to entering the field is clearly in line with the ethos of patchwork ethnography in terms of praxis, but in important respects also helps us to re-conceptualise the 'field' in novel ways that open up avenues for utilising digital technologies in a more rigorous manner.

Post(?)-COVID Conclusions

The future of field-based research and teaching faces significant challenges. Employers and funders continue to pursue cost savings that impact on the capacity of staff and students to conduct fieldwork. The climate crisis has also pushed many to reconsider long distance travel. And the pandemic also dramatically disrupted access to sites across national borders, not the least those of Japan. Digital and hybrid approaches have often been pointed to as a panacea for these challenges. For us, however, the drive towards more digital and hybrid approaches must have due regard to pedagogical and intellectual needs, and the provision of adequate resources to do remote or digital teaching and research properly. Digital and remote explorations are not just about putting content online but involve a completely new set of skills that many academics did not have much experience with before (Mirriahi, Alonzo & Fox, 2015), and those who were already engaged with the digital in the pre-pandemic world have often been faced with push back (Costa, 2015).

The pandemic forced us into developing a new mode of connecting with Japan, while also providing space for experimentation that was made possible by the suspension of some of the more invasive administrative interference in teaching that often occurs in the British context. As we have shown, there were some real positives coming out of this experiment, with students engaging with new forms of knowledge production, developing key practical skills that can be applied across context and increasingly identifying as researchers themselves. Digital and remote methods therefore show great potential as tools to support young scholars and students to build their confidence and researcher identity as well as gain a multifaceted understanding of their field sites before commencing on-site research. Furthermore, digital and remote approaches can facilitate on-going contact and elaboration of research projects between researchers based overseas and their research partners and participants in the field.

However, our class also showed that digital and hybrid approaches cannot fully replicate the advantages of being in the field itself. The prospects of our approaches being replicated in a post-pandemic world also rely on the provision of material resources and a more flexible approach to the administration of teaching – two things not always common in the UK higher education landscape. While the digital did surprisingly offer a convenient and perhaps even a cost-effective way of 'slowing down' research processes, developing digital and remote research and teaching approaches requires resources. Academic colleagues engaging with these methods as part of their research or teaching activities need to be provided the time, space and opportunities for training and competency building. Tensions between staff well-being and corporatised academic structures have already led to staff engaged in research and teaching activities in British universities being overstretched and overworked. A recent survey of over 2000 academic staff indicated that more than 62%

work more than 40 hours a week and 22% work more than 50 hours, with over half reporting signs of resulting depression (Wray & Kingman, 2021).

Therefore, if digitalisation and remote research and teaching are to be increased, resources and time need to be allocated for their proper utilisation within staff workloads and funding structures. Equally, for many academics, digital pedagogy is still in its infancy, with most scholars and academics only having limited engagement with the digital (Costa, 2015). All of this suggests that there is much promise in the greater incorporation of digital and remote methods in teaching, albeit tempered by significant risks associated with the marketised environments we teach and research in.

Our 'field trip from home', allowed us, like the wider development of patchwork ethnographic approaches, to 'refigure what counts as knowledge and what does not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can transform realities that have been described to us as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights' (Günel et al. 2020). These motivations will continue to shape our teaching of fieldwork in Japanese Studies, even as Japan's borders have finally reopened.

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Disclosure statement

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