

Forschung und Lehre

Aus Studierenden werden Forschende: Ausbildung in der Summer Field School in Aso

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Summary

Ethnographic fieldwork is better qualified than textbook studies and quantitative survey data for obtaining a deeper understanding of social life in an unfamiliar setting. Teaching fieldwork, however, is difficult and time-consuming: the focus is usually on singular qualitative research methods; even their mastery remains detached from the processuality of collecting data in the field, where researchers are all too often confronted with unexpected twists and turns. Researchers know that ethnographic studies are not static or fixed, but students do not. We argue that moving the learning environment into unfamiliar and relatively challenging fields helps students realize that ethnographic research is personal, transformational, contingent, and responsive to often-shifting conditions. This report reflects on our direct experience of taking students into the field as part of their education in Japanese Studies. The introduction summarizes the didactic and methodological considerations of the 2019 Aso Summer Field School. The following parts introduce the conceptual background to our research project, and the preparatory training of 10 students. We then describe the progress of the Aso Summer Field School, in which students explored social institutions and organizations so as to discover how “rural happiness” is maintained in the face of regional decline. Student interviews were used to assess the educational outcomes. The conclusion highlights the benefits of student empowerment in research projects, and makes some suggestions for future improvement hereof too.

Keywords: Student training, rural happiness, 2018 Aso Summer Field School

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