

Their concrete accounts of the embeddedness of work illustrate the principles espoused, beginning with a dilemma faced by Ray Suarez in commercial journalism. Suarez was pressured to exaggerate and sensationalize his stories, before later joining National Public Radio. Another account illustrates how genetic engineers create new life forms in a dizzying world of commercialized science. Relatively few seem to be disturbed by the auspices and potential repercussions of their work.

Although not intended primarily as a source of practical advice, the book does offer guidelines. Within their critical project, the authors show how “doing good work *feels* good.” For those who experience institutional and wider social conflicts leading to dissatisfaction in their work, they suggest strategies for “expanding the domain,” “reconfiguring the field” and “taking a stand.” What might they have concluded about the challenges and responses that characterize the profession of anthropology?

Student Internship Opportunities in the Anti-Slavery Campaign

- Apply to the Polaris Project Fellowship Program and join the front lines of the grassroots anti-trafficking movement and one of the premier fellowship programs in Washington DC. (www.PolarisProject.org)
- The American Anti-Slavery Group offers full and part-time internships to individuals interested in advancing the anti-slavery movement. (www.iabolish.com)
- Free the Slaves in Washington DC currently offers unpaid internships to both students and non-students. (www.freetheslaves.net)

Send contribution ideas for the SAW column to Angela Jancius, jancius@ohio.edu.

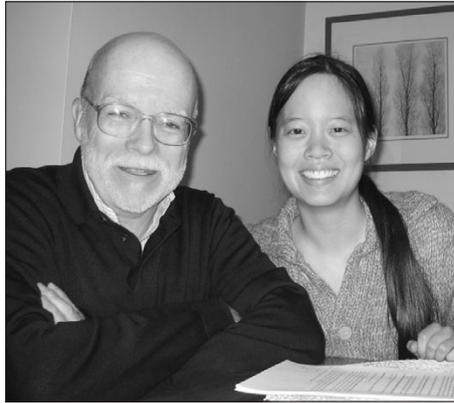
Society for East Asian Anthropology

CAROLYN R STEVENS AND CHRISTINE R YANO,
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Conversation With James (Woody) Watson

James (Woody) Watson, professor of anthropology at Harvard, reluctantly granted an interview for the SEAA column to his doctoral student Priscilla Song after noting, “I don’t really like to talk about these kinds of things. I’m a dyed-in-the-wool Midwesterner who grew up in a little Iowa town, where we learned from age one that one does not celebrate oneself. So I had a lot of trouble with the brand of reflexivity that foregrounds anthropologists at the cost of the people they live among. I don’t think that’s what anthropology should be about.” Below he shares his thoughts on what anthropology *should* be about.

Priscilla Song: *You are Fairbank Professor of Chinese Society at Harvard and former presi-*



James (Woody) Watson and Priscilla Song. Photo courtesy of Priscilla Song

dent of the Association for Asian Studies. Yet you often tell your students that we can’t assume China is interesting.

Woody Watson: I use that to shock my students into realizing there’s something beyond China. There’s always a problem that those of us who work on China get mesmerized by Sino-centrism. The whole essence of Chinese civilization has been designed to mesmerize not only us, as scholars, but also ordinary people in China itself. So we have to resist that kind of hegemony.

PS: *Do you see yourself as a China scholar?*

WW: Of course. All of my writing is based on my work in Cantonese villages and in southern China. But I never felt that I was writing only about China. Nor that anybody actually cared about what I had to say about China. As social anthropologists, we have to address wider audiences and we have to look at general issues. Having lived in Britain for 11 years at an earlier stage in my career, it was a sobering experience being only one of about five anthropologists in all of the UK who worked on China. Frankly, nobody was remotely interested in China. But they were interested in social stratification, kinship, migration and other kinds of problems I worked on.

PS: *You’ve worked on a very diverse set of issues from ancestor worship and diaspora formation, to McDonald’s and genetically modified soybeans. Do you see any common themes?*

WW: There’s always a common line that runs through all my work: the source. If one were to look at my publication record, spinning through it all is ethnography. And most of that ethnography is done in two Cantonese villages in the Pearl River Delta. It just so happens that the people I’ve lived among were interested in ancestor worship in the 1960s. They were crazed by it; they thought it was wonderful. So naturally I thought it was wonderful. But by the time I went back in the 1990s, they could care less. They were interested in McDonalds, in Starbucks, and things like that. I just moved with the times. I haven’t changed so much as

the people I’ve lived among and studied have changed. I’m just a recorder.



PS: *So you’ve really been following the same people.*

WW: Two lineages have tied my work together for close to 40 years. I’ve managed to make friends with some very remarkable people who just happened to have been Cantonese villagers who launched themselves into the world. Long before the term globalism was even invented, they were living it.

PS: *You’ve been doing “multi-sited ethnography” decades before George Marcus invoked the term.*

WW: None of us had any idea what we were doing in those days; we just went off to different places. In fact it was not considered very legitimate when I did it in the late 1960s. When I went from Hong Kong to London to follow the restaurant workers, my supervisors just assumed I wanted an excuse to go to London. Which is perhaps partially true, but I needed to follow the migrants to make the story complete. That was considered a radical move. Now, of course, it’s commonplace. There wasn’t even a vocabulary for the kinds of work that some of us were doing then. We had difficulty publishing, because it wasn’t your usual closed ethnography.

PS: *What advice do you have for junior scholars doing research in a transnationally connected world? You’ve said before that the globe is your fieldsite, but that makes it rather challenging for those just trying to get our footing.*

WW: Always remember that we write about living people who have real problems and real interests. And sometimes, less is better. It’s a hard thing to talk about, when people are concerned about representability, data and quantification. But it’s the mundane, the ordinary, the everyday that makes us good ethnographers. Better ethnographers than scholars of other disciplines, who have now borrowed the term. As long as young anthropologists focus on real problems of ordinary people, they’re going to do okay. The challenge of anthropology is to make the mundane interesting.

Please send contributions to this column to Carolyn Stevens at css@unimelb.edu.au or Christine Yano at cryano@hawaii.edu.

Society for Humanistic Anthropology

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Let Us Meet Outside the US

The AAA, with all of its sections, is one of the leading organizations in the world for anthro-