

JESSAMYN REICH ABEL

Asian Studies Department
Pennsylvania State University

327A Pond Building
University Park, PA 16802
jessamyn.abel@psu.edu

Employment

Pennsylvania State University, Asian Studies and History Departments.

- Professor (2025–present)
- Associate Professor (2020–2025)
- College of the Liberal Arts Endowed Fellow (2022–2024)
- Assistant Professor (2014–2020)
- Affiliated Faculty, School of International Affairs (2016–present)
- History Department, Senior Lecturer (2009–2014)

Bowling Green State University, History Department, Assistant Professor (2006–2008).

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, History Faculty, Lecturer (Fall 2005).

Education

Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Ph.D. in History (1998–2004).

University of Tokyo, Institute of Social Science, Visiting Researcher (2001–2003).

Columbia University, School of International and Public Affairs, Master's (1994–1997).

Princeton University, Department of Politics, B.A. (1988–1992).

Grants, Fellowships, and Prizes

Princeton University Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies Fellowship (Spring 2026).

McCourtney Institute for Democracy Research Grant (2025).

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend (2025).

Global Humanities Research Impact Award, Center for Global Studies, Penn State (2024–2025).

Center for Humanities and Information Faculty Fellow, Penn State University (2024–2025).

Humanities Institute Resident Scholar, Penn State University (2024–2025, declined).

NEAC-AAS, Short-term Research Travel to Japan Grant (2024, 2015).

Japan Foundation Short-Term Research Fellowship, for research travel (2024, declined).

Modern Japan History Association Book Prize for *Dream Super-Express* (2024).

Kenneth B. Pyle Prize for Best Article in the *Journal of Japanese Studies* (2021).

Humanities Institute Resident Scholar, Penn State University (Spring 2019).

Center for the Study of Sports in Society Faculty Research Grant, Penn State Univ. (2018).

Center for Humanities and Information Faculty Fellow, Penn State University (2015–2016).

Japan Foundation Short-Term Research Fellowship, for research travel (2013, 2008).

20th Century Japan Research Award, University of Maryland, College Park (Spring 2013).

Harvard-Yenching Travel Grant, Harvard University, for research travel (Summer 2012).

Kent Forster Memorial Fund Award, Penn State Univ., for research travel (Summer 2011).

Advanced Research Fellow, Program on U.S.-Japan Relations, Harvard Univ. (2008–2009).

Postdoctoral Fellowship, Expanding East Asian Studies Prog., Columbia Univ. (2004–2005).

Richard Hofstadter Multi-year Fellowship from the Columbia History Dept. (1998–2004).

Dissertation Fellowship, Columbia University (2003–2004).

Fulbright–Institute of International Education Grant: research in Japan (2001–2003).

President's Fellowship, Columbia University (2000–2001).

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (1999–2000, Summer 1997, and 1996–1997).
Weatherhead Fellowship (1998–1999) and Training Grant for German (Summer 2001).
Blakemore Foundation Fellowship, Japanese language study, Yokohama, Japan (1997–98).

Publications

BOOKS AND EDITED COLLECTIONS

Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World's First Bullet Train (Stanford University Press, 2022). Winner of the 2024 Modern Japan History Association Book Prize.

The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933–1964 (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

Co-editor with Leo Coleman. "Infrastructures and Global Political Aesthetics." Special issue of *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 6, no. 2 (2020).

ARTICLES

"Training for Democracy: Railways and the Cultivation of a New Postwar Japan." (In progress.)

"The Political-Economy of High-Speed Rail in Japan." (In progress for edited volume.)

"Context Matters: Japan's Regional Soccer Diplomacy, 1998-2004." In Heather Dichter and Michelle Sikes, eds. *Soccer Diplomacy* Vol. II. (Submitted.)

"Information Society on Track: Communication, Crime, and Japan's First Bullet Train." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 349–379. Winner of the Kenneth B. Pyle Prize.

"Railway Stations and the Production of Invisible Infrastructures." *City and Society* 33, no. 2 (August 2021). DOI: 10.1111/CISO.12322.

"Technologies of Cold War Diplomacy: Transforming Japan." *Technology and Culture* (January 2021): 128–155.

(With Leo Coleman), "Dreams of Infrastructure in Global Asias." Introduction to the special issue of *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 6, no. 2 (2020): xi–xxix.

"Borrowed Spectacle: Olympic Rhetoric in Political Battles." In *The Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*, edited by Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang, 515–521. Routledge, 2020.

"The Power of a Line: How the Bullet Train Transformed Urban Space." *Positions: Asia Critique* 27, no. 3 (August 2019): 531–555.

"Ethics and Internationalism in Japanese Education, 1933–1945." *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2018): 532–575.

"Cultural Internationalism and Japan's Wartime Empire." In *Tumultuous Decade: Japan's Challenge to the International System, 1931–41*, edited by Tosh Minohara and Masato Kimura, 17–43. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

"Japan's Sporting Diplomacy: The 1964 Tokyo Olympiad." *The International History Review* 34, no. 2 (June 2012): 1–18.

"When Athletes Are Diplomats: Competing for World Opinion at the Tokyo Olympiads." In *The East Asian Olympiads 1934–2008: Building Bodies and Nations in Japan, Korea, and China*. edited by William M. Tsutsui and Michael Baskett, 49–62. Global Oriental, 2011.

"The Ambivalence of Whaling: Conflicting Cultures in Identity-Formation." In *JAPANimals: History and Culture in Japan's Animal Life*, edited by Gregory M. Pflugfelder and Brett L. Walker, 315–340. Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies 52. Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2005.

REVIEWS

- Review of Ayelet Zohar, *The Curious Case of the Camel in Modern Japan: (De)Colonialism, Orientalism, and Imagining Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2022) for H-Japan (September 2023).
- Review of Sarah Teasley, *Designing Modern Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022) in *Technology and Culture* 64, no. 3 (July 2023): 1014-1016.
- Review of Robert Hellyer, *Green With Milk and Sugar: When Japan Filled America's Tea Cups* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021) in *Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 4 (November 2022): 797-798.
- Review of Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019) in *American Historical Review* 126, no. 2 (June 2021): 777-778.
- Review of Kate McDonald, *Placing Empire: Travel and the Social Imagination in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017) in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 411-414.
- Review of Stefan Huebner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913-1974* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2016) in *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 24, no. 2-3 (2017): 290-292.
- Review of Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*, Ethan Mark, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) in *Pacific Historical Review* 85.3 (August 2016).
- "A Historical Railroad Journey: Review of the Railway Museum in Saitama City, Japan," *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* 4.3 (Winter 2014).
- Review of Sven Saaler and Christopher W.A. Szpilman, eds. *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011) in *Pacific Affairs* 85.3 (Sept 2012).
- Review of James R. Brandon, *Kabuki's Forgotten War: 1931-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009) in *International Journal of Asian Studies* 7.1 (January 2010) 91-93.
- Review of Ray A. Moore and Donald L. Robinson, *Partners for Democracy: Crafting the New Japanese State under MacArthur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) in *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 12.1-2 (Spring-Summer 2003) 129-131.

Recent Presentations, Seminars, and Workshops

- "Training for Democracy: Railways and the Cultivation of a New Postwar Japan," invited lecture at the Japan History Group, University of Tokyo (May 2025).
- "Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World's First Bullet Train," invited lecture at University of Kentucky (April 2025).
- "Practical Democracy: Cultivating a New Postwar Japan," invited lecture at University of Southern California (March 2025).
- "Humanitarianism Under Empire," Modern Japan History Association, discussion with author Michiko Suzuki, New Books on Japan series (online, February 2025).
- "Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World's First Bullet Train," Asia Now Speaker Series, University of Pittsburgh (October 2024).
- "The Spaces of High-Speed Rail," invited lecture, High-Speed Rail Alliance, Chicago (June 2024).
- "Public Diplomacy by the Wartime and Postwar Japanese States," paper presentation at *Welcome to the (Il)liberal State: Place Branding as a Historical Practice*, workshop at Freie University, Berlin (June 2024).

- “Expressing the Unspeakable: Representations of the Atomic Bomb in Postwar Japan,” guest lecture, Japan Women’s University (May 2024).
- “Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World’s First Bullet Train,” Phi Alpha Theta Lecture at Hampden-Sydney College (April 2024).
- “Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World’s First Bullet Train,” Modern Japan History Association Book Prize, discussion with Yuting Dong, New Books on Japan series (April 2024).
- “Thinking with Things: Matchboxes, Posters, and Ephemera,” roundtable at the Conference in Honor of Gregory Pflugfelder, Columbia University (April 2024).
- “Human-Animal Relations,” guest teaching, Colloquium in Modern Japanese History: New Directions in Historical Scholarship, Columbia University (April 2024).
- “Training for Democracy: Cultivators of a New Postwar Japan, 1945–1955,” paper presentation at the Modern Japan Seminar, Columbia University (April 2024).
- “Knowledge and Power in Postwar Japan’s Hidden Social Movements,” roundtable at Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Seattle (March 2024).
- “Political Activism and Japanese Film, 1960s-70s,” invited lecture at University of Oregon (March 2024).
- “The History of the First Shinkansen,” invited lecture, *Getting to Know Japan* series, hosted by the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies (online, March 2024).
- “Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World’s First Bullet Train,” invited lecture at University of Texas-Austin (February 2024).
- “Dream Super-Express: A Cultural History of the World’s First Bullet Train,” Japan Zoominar @ UC San Diego, Japan Forum for Innovation and Technology (December 2023).
- “Dreams and Nightmares of the Super-Express in 1960s Japan,” invited lecture at Michigan State University (November 2023).
- “Dream Super-Express,” invited lecture at the University of Chicago (November 2023).
- “Dream Super-Express,” invited lecture at Columbia University (October 2023).
- “The Aesthetics of Economic Performance in Postwar and Contemporary Japan,” *Association for Japanese Literary Studies Annual Meeting*, Pittsburgh (May 2023). Panel discussant.
- “Disastrous Infrastructures: Logics and Lessons of Reconstruction,” roundtable at *Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting*, Boston (March 2023). Roundtable Chair and Organizer.
- “Orientalists, Peace Activists, and Diplomatic Wives: China and Japan’s Informal Diplomats in Europe, 1870s-1950s,” *Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting*, Boston (March 2023). Panel discussant.
- “Japan’s Soccer Diplomacy in Asia and the World,” invited lecture at Waseda University, Tokyo (March 2023).
- “Activism on the Line: Why the Bullet Train Stops in Kyoto,” invited lecture at Amherst College (November 2022).
- “The Social Life of Infrastructure: 1960s Japan and the World’s First Bullet Train,” invited lecture at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (April 2022).
- “‘This is Happening Everywhere’: The Aesthetic Power of Infrastructure in Japan ... and the World,” *Japan in Global Context: Inspiring the Next Generation of Historians*, Columbia University (April 2022).
- “A New Tokyo, Again: Local Impacts of Olympic Diplomacy,” *Olympic Games and Global Cities*, Fondation France-Japon de l’EHESS International Conference, Paris/online (November 2021).

- “Tokyo Olympics, Past and Present,” Penn State Alumni Association Virtual Speaker Series, online (May 2021).
- Discussant, Infrastructure cluster, InterAsia Academy, Social Science Research Council InterAsia Program, online (February 2021).
- “Borrowed Spectacle: Olympic Symbolism in Political Battles,” invited presentation to “Be Better, Together” Japanese Studies Curriculum Development across CUNY, supported by the Japan Foundation, online (February 2021).
- “The Fast Trains of a World Power: Nostalgia for Empire in Postwar Japan,” invited lecture, Asian Studies Program, Vanderbilt University, online (October 2020).
- Keynote lecture, *Japan Studies Institute* (sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), San Diego State University (June 2020). [Canceled due to COVID-19].
- “The Tokyo Olympics: Promises and Pitfalls of Hosting,” *Japan Studies Institute* (sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), webinar, online (May 2020).
- “Democratic Infrastructures: Planning the First Bullet Train, 1958–1964,” invited lecture, *Program on U.S.-Japan Relations Seminar Series*, Harvard University (October 2019).
- “The Tokyo Olympiads: 1940 • 1964 • 2020,” *Japan Studies Institute* (sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), San Diego State University (June 2019).
- “The Fast Trains of a Modern Power: Manchurian Rail in Japanese Empire and Memory,” *Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting*, Denver (March 2019). “Infrastructural Imaginaries I: Projects and Places,” Panel Chair, Presenter, and Organizer of two-part panel.

Teaching

- Pennsylvania State University (2009–present): What is Asia? (in-person and asynchronous online), Sports in Asia, International Culture in East Asia, Technology and Society in Japan, Japan in the World, Gods to Godzilla: Survey of Japanese Culture, Survey of Japanese Civilization, Early Modern Japan, Modern Japan Since 1800, History of Modern East Asia, First-Year Seminars in Asian Studies and History, Undergraduate Seminars (writing-intensive) in Asian Studies and History, Asian Studies Graduate Proseminar II.
- Bowling Green State University, Assistant Professor (2006–2008): Asian Civilizations, Pre-Modern Japan, Modern Japan, International Culture in East Asia, Graduate Seminar: Japanese History.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Lecturer (Fall 2005): Ancient Japan and the Courtly Society, Emergence of the Modern Japanese State.
- Columbia University, Postdoctoral Fellow (Fall 2004): International Culture in East Asia.

Service

- Book Review Editor, *Journal of Japanese Studies* (2024–2027).
- Chair of the Conference Program Committee and member of the Board of Directors, Association for Asian Studies (2025–2026); Vice-Chair, Conference Program Committee (2024–2025).
- Fulbright-IIE National Screening Committee for Japan (2023–2025).
- College of the Liberal Arts Undergraduate Studies Committee (2023–present).
- College of the Liberal Arts Graduate Student Award Review Committee (2023–present).
- Asian Studies Department Jansen Funding Committee (2025–present).
- ASIA 100 web course revision (2025).
- College of the Liberal Arts Big Ideas Undergraduate Certificate Committee (2024–2025).
- Reviewer, Harvard Univ. Program on U.S.-Japan Relations, Postdoctoral Fellowships (2025, 2016).
- Mentor, Association for Asian Studies Mentoring Program (2023, 2024, 2025).

College of the Liberal Arts Immediate Tenure Committee (2022–2024).

Asian Studies Department Faculty Advisory Committee (2022–2024).

Editorial collective, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* (2014–present).

- Co-editor of special issue on Infrastructure (2020)
- Organizer, Global Asias panel (2017), roundtable (2019)
- Co-director of 2018 Summer Institute

Asian Studies Department ASIA 100 Committee (2022–2023).

Hiring and promotion

- Korean History hiring committee (2024).
- South Asian Religions hiring committee (2024).
- Hindi language instructor hiring committee (2022).
- Chinese language coordinator hiring committee (2022).
- Seven language instructor hiring or promotion committees from 2017 to 2021.

Director of Undergraduate Studies, Asian Studies Department (May 2014–June 2021).

- Created Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate programs with the School of International Affairs for the Asian Studies, Chinese, and Japanese majors.
- Restructured and expanded the undergraduate curriculum.
- Recertified, strengthened, and expanded our list of General Education courses.

Honors Advisor, Asian Studies and Korean (2014–2021).

Faculty working group member and lecturer, *Moments of Change: Remembering '68 Program*, PSU College of Liberal Arts (2017–2018).

Legendary Liberal Arts Course Incubator (2017–2018).

Curricular Affairs Committee, College of the Liberal Arts (2014–2015, 2016–2018).

Reviewer, Social Science Research Council, Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship Program (2015–2016).

Co-organizer, “Utopias on Display” workshop, Penn State Global Japan Project (2015–2016).

Head of selection committee, CHI Predoctoral Fellowship (Fall 2015, member in Fall 2016).

NEAC Distinguished Speaker Grant for visit by Carol Gluck (March 17–18, 2014).

New Course Proposal Coordinator, History Department (2013–2014).

Committee member, Japan-GEN Task Force (2013).

Media

“Culturalstudies” Podcast with Toby Miller (October 7, 2024). <https://www.podbean.com/eas/pb-nf29j-16fb974>.

Radio program (interview): “High-speed rail: Celebrating Six Decades of Very Fast Trains,” *The Forum*, BBC World Radio (September 2025). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct5n0d>.

Interview with Sameer Kumar for Books First, March 18, 2024 (BooksFirst.in).

Interview with Alexis Benveniste for the BBC on over-tourism in Kyoto, March 18, 2024.

Featured in news article: Josh McAuliffe, “Jessamyn Abel receives Modern Japan History Association Book Prize,” *PSU News* March 13, 2024.

Interview with Régis Arnaud for *Le Figaro* and *France Japon Eco*, December 7, 2023.

Featured in news article: Josh McAuliffe, “Asian Studies professor receives Kenneth B. Pyle Prize,” *PSU News* November 4, 2022 (<https://www.psu.edu/news/liberal-arts/story/asian-studies-professor-receives-kenneth-b-pyle-prize/>).

Interview with Arfad Al Janabi for Asharq News (Dubai). Aired on October 20, 2022 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUM_Vdsc6g).

Interview for newspaper article: James Balmont, "Can Hollywood save the bullet train from terminal decline?," *The Telegraph* 3 August 2022 (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/can-hollywood-save-bullet-train-terminal-decline/>).

Blog entry: "The Page 99 Test" (<https://page99test.blogspot.com/2022/06/jessamyn-r-abels-dream-super-express.html>).

Interview by Maura Cunningham for #AsiaNow, blog of the AAS (<https://www.asianstudies.org/dream-super-express-a-qa-with-jessamyn-r-abel/>).

Interview by Nathan Hopson for the New Books Network on *Dream Super-Express*, June 2, 2022 (<https://newbooksnetwork.com/dream-super-express>).

Featured in news article: Katie Bohne, "Exploring how the world's first bullet train captivated the globe," *PSU News* February 17, 2022.

Interview by Motoko Rich for a front-page story on the Tokyo Olympics in the *New York Times*, July 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/23/world/asia/tokyo-olympics-opening-ceremony.html>.

Interview by Carla Nappi for the New Books Network on *The International Minimum*, October 24, 2016 (<https://newbooksnetwork.com/jessamyn-r-abel-the-international-minimum-creativity-and-contradiction-in-japans-global-engagement-1933-1964-u-of-hawaii-press-2015/>).