

31. GENDER-WORKSHOP IM RAHMEN DER JAHRESTAGUNG DER VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTLICHE JAPANFORSCHUNG E.V. (06.–07. NOVEMBER 2025)

**31ST GENDER WORKSHOP IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON JAPAN (06–07 NOVEMBER 2025)**

<i>Venue:</i>	<i>Organisers:</i>
First day: University of Vienna Main Building Marietta-Blau-Saal Universitätsring 1 1010 Vienna	Annette Schad-Seifert (<i>Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf</i>) schadsei[at]hhu.de Kerstin Fooker (<i>Universität Hamburg</i>) kerstin.fooken[at]uni-hamburg.de
Second day: Department of East Asian Studies Japanese Studies Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2.4 (Campus) 1090 Vienna	

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Participation is free of charge, registration is not required

The Workshop will be held in English

Please note the venue-change for the second day, Fri 7 Nov

Programme

Thursday	06/Nov/2025 Marietta-Blau-Saal
13:00 h	Welcome <i>Annette Schad-Seifert, Kerstin Fooker</i>
Panel 1: Women, Media and Social Realities	
13:30 h	Adult Women’s Disconnection from Legacy Mass Media and Entertainment in Japan in the 2020s <i>Sharon Kinsella, University of Manchester (UK)</i>
14:10 h	Ageing Alone in Japan: the Precarity Faced by Middle-Aged Never Married Women <i>Caitlin Meagher, University of North Carolina (USA)</i>
14:50 h	“My Life Has Been Enriched”: Older Women as Digital Role Models <i>Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer, Universität Wien (Austria)</i>

Panel 2: Political Representation and Gender

- 16:00 h** **Legislative Representation of Women in Japan: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Issue Bill Initiation and Adoption**
Elena Korshenko, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- 16:40 h** **Little Divide in Views, Deep Divide in Practices: Institutions and Culture that Keep Gender Matter in Substantive Representation**
Tanaka Shoko, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- 17:20 h** **"Names are a Human Right": Mapping Human Rights Framings in Parliamentary Debates on Separate Surnames with Computational Methods**
Johanna Fritz Momm, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- 19:00 h** **Restaurant Dinner** (Wirtshaus Brösl, Wohlmutterstr. 23, 1020 Wien)

Friday **07/Nov/2025** **Institute of Japanese Studies**

Panel 3: Who is Afraid of Gender?

- 09:00 h** **Transnational Transphobia: Anti-Transgender Discourses and their International Influences in Contemporary Japan**
Lyman R.T. Gamberton, Independent Scholar (UK)
- 09:40 h** **Solidarity Instead of 'Eat or be Eaten': Female Strategies Against Oppression and Exploitation in the Manga Series *Yakusoku no Nebārando***
Tim Heißenberger, Universität Wien (Austria)

Panel 4: Gender and Empire

- 10:50 h** **(Homo-)National Pasts? Male Queer Desire and/as Tradition in Imperial Japan**
Andy Astakhova, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)
- 11:30 h** **Fighting with Fantasy: Kazuko Murayama's Use of The Absurd as Resistance to Gendered Inequality in Imperial Japan**
Joe Nickols, SOAS University of London / The British Museum (UK)
- 12:10 h** **Closing Discussion**

Abstracts

Thursday, 06/Nov/2025

Panel 1: Women, Media and Social Realities

Adult Women's Disconnection from Legacy Mass Media and Entertainment in Japan in the 2020s

Sharon Kinsella, University of Manchester (UK)

Fieldwork comprised of 40 interviews with women aged 30 to 72 and located across semi-rural and urban Japan, in Autumn 2024, revealed a very interesting moment in their wholesale dislike and disconnection from national mass media, news, and entertainment. This incorporated not only the almost complete abandonment of television sets and newspapers, but also a declining interest in terrestrial television shows and drama series, and national news and entertainment. This paper is an initial exploration and analysis of the findings and will discuss the intriguing new outlooks reported by women rapidly departing from alignment with a system of postwar culture and social communication that feels increasingly prescriptive, formulaic and irrelevant to their current concerns and experiences. Women of all ages grappled to find alternative narratives, culture, and sources of information, and reported the additional screening efforts they undertook to attempt to control their exposure and reaction to televised news information. In addition to a strong distrust of the news-media and dwindling enthusiasm for formulaic drama and variety shows on television, women expressed a specific lack of interest in fiction and fantasy drama and film genres and animation, a preference for documentary, realism, and actual personal connections through social media as a means of extricating from a no longer relevant 'hegemonic' culture, and as a means to sustain direction, trust, and meaning.

Ageing Alone in Japan: The Precarity Faced by Middle-Aged Never Married Women

Caitlin Meagher, University of North Carolina (USA)

In recent years, much popular and scholarly attention has been paid to what sociologist Yamada Masahiro (Masahiro 2014) has referred to as the "singlization" of Japan. This phenomenon broadly refers to the increase in never-married singles, both male and female, but special attention has been paid to never-married single women. Much of this attention has been focused either on very young women of marriage age who are seen to be actively choosing singlehood for themselves, for better or worse; or the elderly (widowed, divorced, or never-married) Japanese women who make up the majority of single-person households in Japan and who experience disproportionate rates of poverty. In this paper, I direct our attention to the generation of now middle-aged never-married women (the "*mikon* middle") who came of age during the first decade of the new millennium, when the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants declined by 14% (6.4 marriages in 2000 to 5.5 in 2010 [Statista 2024]). This paper describes the realities faced by never-married women facing old age in a society that is still significantly designed for nuclear families rather than single individuals, particularly the labor market and the pension system. I argue that this generation of single women face a unique constellation of challenges in a Japan that is adapting to new social realities, but not adapting quickly enough to counteract long-term consequences of an imbalance and unequal labor and pension system predicated on the [male] single earner-led household that is increasingly less representative. Drawing on recent survey data, I describe the perils and trepidations of aging alone as a woman in contemporary Japan, from housing to healthcare to social belonging.

“My Life Has Been Enriched”: Older Women as Digital Role Models

Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer, Universität Wien (Austria)

In recent years, a certain type of self-help or how-to books has appeared on bookstore shelves in Japan. These books are written by older adults, who share their experiences with digital technologies and social media. The authors are very often single or widowed senior women, who acquired computer and internet skills upon reaching retirement age. Examples include Wakamiya Masako (born 1935), the prominent “world’s oldest programmer”, who promotes a “happy digital life” (*shiawase dejitaru seikatsu*); Ōsaki Hiroko (1932-2024), who attracted more than 200.000 followers on the platform X; or Mizoi Kikuko (born 1932), who also became known as “Twitter Granny” (*tsuittā obāchan*). These women can be seen as role models for a digitally active life, countering the stereotype of technology-shy seniors. By examining these self-help books, I focus on the age and gender roles that are presented and how digital competence and empowerment are linked.

Panel 2: Political Representation and Gender

Legislative Representation of Women in Japan: A Comparative Analysis of Women’s Issue Bill Initiation and Adoption

Elena Korshenko, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany), co-authored with Jaemin Shim (HKBU)

Against the background of a persistently high level of gender inequality in Japan, this paper examines how the interests of women are represented in the Japanese Diet and why the progress in this area has been limited. Specifically, it seeks to understand which elected politicians are more likely to propose bills related to women and when their proposals are more likely to succeed and become laws. To this end, the paper focuses on the so-called “women’s issue” bills, which address the issues affecting or disadvantaging women more than men, such as domestic and sexual violence, reproductive health, motherhood, and gender roles. Drawing insights from existing gender politics and legislative studies literature, the study examines whether and to what extent bill co-sponsors’ individual characteristics (gender, seniority, and party affiliation) facilitate the initiation of women’s issue bills and their subsequent adoption. To explore the impact of these conditions, the paper applies regression analyses to an original dataset, comprising all private member’s bills submitted to the Lower House of the Diet between 1998 and 2024, as well as the characteristics of their co-sponsors. On the one hand, the analyses reveal that junior female legislators affiliated with left-wing parties are particularly likely to promote women’s legislative representation by sponsoring related bills in the Japanese parliament. On the other hand, they also demonstrate that all the conditions favourable to women’s issue bill submission are detrimental to the passage of these bills. These findings illuminate an additional mechanism behind the marginalisation of women’s issues in the Japanese Diet, which suggests a trade-off between the two types of women’s substantive representation: representation “as process” advanced through bill initiation and representation as “outcome” realized through bill adoption.

Little Divide in Views, Deep Divide in Practices: Institutions and Culture that Keep Gender Matter in Substantive Representation

Tanaka Shoko, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)

In most advanced industrial democracies, clear gender differences can be observed in issue preferences, value orientations, and patterns of party support. Women are typically more engaged with social issues, more likely to endorse egalitarian and postmaterialist values, and more inclined to support parties on the left. Japan stands out as an exception to this broader tendency. Despite being consistently ranked among the countries with the widest gender gaps in the OECD, Japanese men and women exhibit only limited differences in their political orientations and party alignments. This paradox raises two interrelated lines of enquiry: first, why are gender-based differences in political attitudes muted in Japan compared to other advanced democracies? Second, how can the country's enduring gender gap in substantive representation be explained in the absence of such attitudinal divides? Addressing these questions is especially pressing in the current political climate. On the one hand, Japanese youth show signs of a conservative drift; on the other, the urgency of enhancing youth political engagement is widely acknowledged. To investigate these dynamics, this study employs quantitative analyses of both primary and secondary survey data, focusing on the shaping of political orientations and attitudes among young people. To situate the findings, I further draw on scholarly literature and media discourse concerning the broader institutional and cultural environment in Japan. The analyses reveal some gender differences that suggest potential for women's active political engagement. However, the overall picture is one of reluctance and withdrawal among youth, a tendency that has intensified during the long dominance of the LDP. Combined with persistent economic stagnation and inflation, these dynamics appear to reinforce patterns of disengagement, further constraining women's political participation and deepening the paradox at the core of Japan's gender gap.

"Names are a Human Right": Mapping Human Rights Framings in Parliamentary Debates on Separate Surnames with Computational Methods

Johanna Fritzi Momm, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)

What does it mean when Japanese politicians assert that "names are a human right" (*namae wa jinken*, Nihi Sohei, 26 March 2025)? In my presentation I investigate how debates surrounding separate surname legislation are framed within the Japanese Diet, with a particular focus on the intersection of human rights discourse and political debates on gendered issues. By integrating computational methods such as word embeddings and structural topic modelling with discourse analysis, this case study attempts to map the rhetorical and ideological contours of the debate. As the issue of marital surnames continues to reflect deep tensions around gender, family, and identity in Japan, I examine how the term "bessei" (separate surnames) is discursively framed by lawmakers over time. Using natural language processing (NLP) methods, I analyzed a corpus of Japanese Diet transcripts from 2015 to 2025. I trained word embedding models and structural topic models for each year to identify terms and topics most semantically associated with "bessei" and ran analyses on how party affiliation and time affect the resulting map. Through an interdisciplinary and intersectional lens, this presentation aims to shed light on how separate surnames are positioned as a human rights issue and how this framing contributes to broader narratives of human rights and gender in contemporary Japan.

Friday, 07/Nov/2025

Panel 3: Who is Afraid of Gender?

Transnational Transphobia: Anti-Transgender Discourses and their International Influences in Contemporary Japan

Lyman R.T. Gamberton, Independent Scholar (UK)

This paper analyses the rise of anti-transgender discourses in Japan since 2018 and the broader transnational implications of the 'anti-gender' movement, with specific reference to the intersection of Anglophone and Japanese-speaking feminist theory.

Discourses that attack transgender people from an ostensibly feminist perspective have been increasing transnationally since 2017. While these arguments are couched as feminist or progressive, they are often endorsed or advanced by illiberal populist groups, both in the UK and in Japan (c.f. Yamaguchi, 2009).

Although Japanese feminist movements have historically been neutral-to-welcoming regarding trans women (Hori, 2019), the summer of 2018 saw an explosive spike in anti-transgender messaging on the Japanese internet, especially on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter. The commonly accepted trigger for this was the decision of Ochanomizu and Tsuda Universities to accept trans women as students regardless of the legal gender listed on their *koseki* [family register]. These anti-transgender sentiments were presented as an evolution of Japanese feminist consciousness following the rise of the country's #MeToo movement and high-profile sexual assault cases such as that of the journalist Itō Shiori. However, as Shimizu (2020) observes, much of this backlash is not a product of 'indigenous' Japanese feminism at all, but rather imported from Anglophone sources. This transnational angle is also evident in the ways that transphobia has moved offline and into the Japanese political sphere, including the use of phrases like "TRA [Trans Rights Activist]" to describe moderate or conservative politicians like Inada Tomomi.

I begin this paper with an overview of the increasing anti-transgender discourses in Japanese from 2018 to the present. I then move on to detail qualitative and quantitative evidence for the transnational elements of these discourses. I conclude with some reflections on the current sociopolitical situation for trans people in Japan and some potential future developments.

Solidarity Instead of 'Eat or be Eaten': Female Strategies Against Oppression and Exploitation in the Manga Series *Yakusoku no Nebārando*

Tim Heißenberger, Universität Wien (Austria)

The manga series *Yakusoku no Nebārando* (The Promised Neverland, Shirai/Demizu, 2016-2020) was praised for its progressive depiction of a female protagonist and its discussion of factory farming, both of which are unusual for the genre *shōnen* manga. While both *mangaka* refute the notion that they wanted to criticise gender norms or meat consumption, these issues clearly permeate the plot: The main characters are human children that are being farmed as food in the demon world, and, as the analysis of the plot and characters in my master's thesis (2024) shows, meat consumption and gender are clearly connected in the diegesis. Previous research on this series focused on aspects other than meat production, which is why I apply Melanie Joy's theory of carnism (2009) to demonstrate that *Yakusoku no Nebārando* can be read as a critique of a carnist society. However, I argue that the meat industry itself is not presented as the main antagonist but rather serves as an analogy for the various forms of exploitation within capitalist societies.

My talk at the *Gender Workshop 2025* is centered around a chapter of my master's thesis that discusses how various characters navigate and overcome the gendered power structures. On the one hand, the manga series contrasts the 12-year-old female protagonist's compassionate striving towards a society free from exploitation with her male best friend's pragmatic plan to fight the demons with biological weapons. On the other hand, the series illustrates how the political élite relies on inhibiting solidarity between different oppressed groups. This is particularly exemplified in the human female farm workers, who are exploited twofold for their (re)productive abilities, as both unpaid labourers themselves and as the ones who give birth to the children, who are raised as food for the demons. Only through collective self-empowerment, by forming a *sisterhood* in the sense of bell hooks (1984), are the human farm workers able to overcome the 'divide-and-conquer' strategy employed by the political élite. Furthermore, the protagonist breaks through the fourth wall and appeals to the reader to reflect on their own behaviour and to stand up against real-world social injustices. Therefore, I argue that *Yakusoku no Nebārando* presents compassion and intersectional solidarity as a practical approach to fight – fictional and real-world – systems of exploitation.

Panel 4: Gender and Empire

(Homo-)National Pasts? Male Queer Desire and/as Tradition in Imperial Japan

Andy Astakhova, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)

Before the modern period, male homoerotic intimacy was widespread and often socially sanctioned across East Asia. In Japan, such intimacy (often referred to as *nanshoku*) was commonplace and highly aestheticized within the warrior and theater milieus, among others. Although male same-sex practices were increasingly marginalized in the modern period, their discursive associations with military masculinity and aesthetic refinement persisted well into the twentieth century. As the search for “tradition” was crucial to constructing modern Japanese national identity, certain homoerotic discourses grounded in the past occasionally found ways to reinsert themselves into national(ist) imaginaries—at times not merely dismissed or tolerated, but actively mobilized to support imperial ideologies.

I argue that such is the case with Tachibana Sotō’s Naoki Prize-winning *Recollections of His Highness Narin* (*Narin denka e no kaisō*, 1938), a wartime novel which narrates a *nanshoku*-inflected bond between its Japanese protagonist and an Indian prince as a proxy for an imagined anti-British alliance between imperial Japan and colonial India. I ask how the author and his critics aligned the protagonist’s queer desire with imperial objectives in wartime Japan, and whether Jasbir Puar’s concept of “homonationalism”—the appropriation of queer identities and narratives by nationalist projects—can illuminate these dynamics. In doing so, I aim to contribute to queer historical scholarship that moves beyond treating queerness as inherently subversive or liberatory, highlighting instead its potential entanglements with nationalism and imperialism beyond contemporary Western contexts.

Fighting with Fantasy: Kazuko Murayama’s Use of The Absurd as Resistance to Gendered Inequality in Imperial Japan

Joe Nickols, SOAS University of London / The British Museum (UK)

Kazuko Murayama (1903-1946) was an author, journalist, artist, and critic who openly spoke out against gendered inequality in 1920s Japan. Murayama was a vocal figure in popular media during the Taishō era, participating in protest art as a contributor of the anarchic avantgarde *Mavo* collective. Outside of *Mavo*, Murayama authored popular and progressive children’s stories that challenged the political status quo. Murayama’s stories are grounded in farcical fantasies, with many featuring anthropomorphized animals or inanimate objects. Murayama’s deployment of fantasy critiqued the state’s implementation of gendered social expectations by heightening the absurdist “unreal” authority that called the gender matrix into existence. It exposes the illusion of power and the inequitable consequences of maintaining Imperial polity. Murayama developed an intriguing antiestablishment ideology that was powerfully upheld by the author in life and her literary works.

Murayama’s work entered into a Japanese society that was becoming increasingly homogenized through capitalism and authoritarian militarization. Murayama’s physical body, presenting an androgynous appearance, and written work flouted many of the gendered policies of the time. The matrix of Imperial Japan’s society was integrally woven together with gender as the newly formulated national identity was continually reinforced by gendered and bodily regulations, which were keenly surveilled. Imperial Japan’s ruling regime wanted to assert Japan’s authority on the world stage and was fearful of phantasmic emasculation. Gender and sexual disobedience resulted in abject status, with legal ramifications and potential police brutality. My research situates Murayama’s stories and her life in the complex commands of Imperial Japan’s gendered authority and how these stories challenge the metaphysical reach of those commands.