

**VSJF Jahrestagung 2026***VSJF Annual Conference 2026***Programm der Fachgruppen**
*VSJF Section Meetings***Freitag, 13. November 2026****Online only*****9.00 Uhr bis 11.30 Uhr**
*9 a.m. to 11.30 p.m.***Technik (online)***
*Technology (online)***S. 2**
*p. 2***Samstag, 14. November 2026****Online only*****9.30 Uhr bis 11.45 Uhr**
*9.30 a.m. to 11.45 a.m.***Geschichte (online)**
*History (online)***S. 4**
*p. 4***Hybrid***

Universität Wien
Institut für Ostasienwissenschaften
Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2, Tür 2.4 (Campus)
1090 Wien

9.30 Uhr bis 13.00 Uhr
*9.30 a.m. to 13.00 p.m.***Bildung und Erziehung (hybrid)***
*Education (hybrid)***S. 7**
*p. 7***Kultur, Medien und Kommunikation (hybrid)***
*Culture, Media and Communication (hybrid)***S. 12**
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*Political Sciences (hybrid)***S. 17**
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*Sociology/Social Anthropology (hybrid)***S. 23**
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* Die Links zur online-Teilnahme finden Sie bei den einzelnen Fachgruppenprogrammen. / *The links for online participation can be found in the individual section meetings' programs.*



13. November 2026

Technik / Technology

(Time zone: Germany / Japan)

Organizers: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Susanne Brucksch (Teikyo University, Japan)
Dr. Cosima Wagner (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Date: November 13, 2026 (Fri)

Venue: Online Meeting (VSJF Annual conference, University of Vienna)
Participation via login data will be provided after prior registration via email:
technology[a]vsjf.net (until Nov 12, 2026).

09:00 Germany // 17:00 Japan

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Cosima Wagner, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

09:15 Germany // 17:15 Japan

Session A: Digitalization and AI Technology in Public Policy in Japan

Moderator: Cosima Wagner, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Corporate Imaginaries of Smart Urbanity under Japan's Society 5.0 Agenda

Felix Spremberg, Ghent University, Belgium

What Is Digitalisation For? How Museums Frame It in Japan and Italy

Sieun Park, Chuo University, Japan

Project Report: Artificial Intelligence and Welfare Services in Japanese Municipalities

Susanne Brucksch, Teikyo University, Japan

10:45 Germany // 18:45 Japan

Short Break

10:55 Germany // 18:55 Japan

Session B: Open Exchange and Discussion

Further exchange on research projects, etc.

Moderator: Susanne Brucksch, Teikyo University, Japan

11:30 Germany // 19:30 Japan

End of Section Meeting

***Corporate Imaginaries of Smart Urbanity under Japan's Society 5.0 Agenda***

Felix Spremberg, Ghent University, Belgium

Japan's official Society 5.0 agenda offers a vision for a new, "super-smart" society, in which ecological, economic and social problems are resolved through new, data-driven modes of production and consumption. With smart cities being the first sites of experimentation with Society 5.0 connectedness and algorithmic management, I investigate three prominent greenfield smart cities regarding their power relations and underlying ideologies: Toyota's Woven City, Kashiwa-no-ha Smart City, and Fujisawa SST. Building on STS, regulation theory and the emerging field of critical hype studies, I argue that smart urbanity in Japan relies on techno-solutionism and technological hype to legitimize Toyotist mechanisms of control, notably the subjectivation of work and visualization of various data. In doing so, unsustainable modes of production and consumption are preserved rather than innovated. By sidelining visions and ideas for truly sustainable futures, Japanese imaginaries of smart urbanity are paradoxically conservative while intensifying capitalist exploitation.

What Is Digitalisation For? How Museums Frame It in Japan and Italy

Sieun Park, Chuo University, Japan

Since the early 2020s, museum digitalisation has become one of the major national policy objectives in Japan and Italy. However, these policies leave open what museums are expected to do and to what extent. This research examines how museums meet these demands in practice, using policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews with directors, staff in charge of digital work, and curators at seven Japanese and five Italian museums. The presentation first outlines how national policy addresses museum digitalisation and how museum staff describe its effects on their work. It then turns to the resources on which digital work depends. Preliminary analysis suggests that most museums lack both dedicated staff and discretionary funding for digital work, and that their responses differ more by whether they aim to do so through digital practices than by where their funding comes from.

Project Report: Artificial Intelligence and Welfare Services in Japanese Municipalities

Susanne Brucksch, Teikyo University

Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an emerging technology evokes manifold hopes, expectations, and concerns across various disciplines. The practical application of AI technologies increasingly intersects with various social contexts in Japan, among them is the field of welfare services. AI applications are introduced in various municipalities with the promise to provide orientation and advice on topics like child protection, elderly care, disability support or healthcare. Among local communities and other facilities these AI applications are presented as tools for receiving advice, raising efficiency, or improving decision-making for persons in charge. This leads to the question in which ways and to what extent does AI technology improve and secure the access to welfare services on local level. A quantitative newspaper analysis among articles of the Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun between Jul 2023 till Jun 2025 shows that the topic of AI in reference to health, care and disability support topics receives continuous attention. In contrast, the attention for AI technology in reference to childcare and child protection related topics have surged particularly since Jan 2025. The paper intends to deepen the quantitative insights of the newspaper analysis by furthering the study with a qualitative case study on AI welfare service applications in Shinagawa ward in Tokyo and other municipalities.



14. November 2026

Geschichte / History

09:30-11:45 (CET), 17:30-19:45 (JST)

Organizers: Anke Scherer (Ruhr University Bochum)

Torsten Weber (DIJ Tokyo)

This Meeting will take place ONLINE ONLY via ZOOM:

Meeting-ID: 632 1060 5290

Password: 027434

[https://ruhr-uni-bochum-zoom-x.de/j/63210605290?pwd=x6MVYyhCXxa7XoUOMLSHBnzawTxNpW.1](https://ruhr-uni-bochum.zoom-x.de/j/63210605290?pwd=x6MVYyhCXxa7XoUOMLSHBnzawTxNpW.1)

Zoom Etiquette: Participants can enter and leave the meeting by themselves. Permission from the host is not necessary. Please turn off your microphone when you are not speaking to avoid noise interference etc.

9:30–10:15 (CET) / 17:30–18:15 (JST): Hacer Elmacı (University of Leeds) “Teaching the Empire, Building Gendered Nation: A Comparative Study of the Presentation of the Colonial Past and Nationhood in Japanese and English School History Textbooks”

This study examines how colonialism and gender-based national identities are constructed discursively in secondary school history textbooks in Japan and England. It explores the impact of the colonial past on the concepts of 'Japaneseness' and 'Englishness'. Specifically, the study seeks to answer how the Japanese and English nations are imagined, invented, reproduced, and transmitted through depictions of their imperial past in a gendered context. Twelve history textbooks currently in use at the secondary school level in England and Japan were analysed for the study. These textbooks were analysed using critical visual and critical discourse analysis methods in relation to nationalism, postcolonial and gender theoretical perspectives. Themes of parenthood, citizenship and leadership were identified in the analysis. It is therefore evident that both Japanese and English textbooks address parenthood from a gendered perspective. Motherhood and fatherhood are depicted as inseparable aspects of femininity and masculinity, as well as biological sources of national identity. The most significant difference between the two countries in the context of representations of parenthood lies in how they are constructed by different social classes through historical narratives. While Japanese textbooks present social classes through historical narratives. Japanese textbooks predominantly feature middleclass farming families, while English textbooks depict upper-class and ruling-class families and parenting. Notably, both countries' textbooks also feature narratives about leadership, particularly those related to monarchy. When historical narratives are examined in the context of citizenship, the focus is on women's rights. Japanese and English textbooks both cover women's suffrage similarly. However, narratives of masculinity tend to differ.



Japanese masculinity is constructed through compulsory military service, and thus through a narrative of citizenship based on responsibility.

10:15–11:00 (CET) / 18:15–19:00 (JST) Maria Carlotta Avanzi (Akita Prefectural University) “The Namahage of Oga: Commodification, Heritage, and Cultural Boundaries in Contemporary Japan”

The Namahage of Oga, a well-known ritual tradition from the Oga Peninsula in Akita Prefecture, offers an important case for examining the transformation of local cultural practices under contemporary social and economic pressures. Traditionally performed on New Year's Eve, masked figures visit households to admonish children, ward off evil spirits, and pray for prosperity. Over recent decades, however, demographic decline, tourism development, and heritage policies have significantly reshaped both the practice and its social meaning.

This research investigates the changing forms of Namahage, focusing particularly on the Namahage-Sedō Matsuri, which has transformed a household ritual into a public event aimed at visitors through staged performances and commercial activities. Adopting a comparative perspective, the project also examines Switzerland's Tschäggättä tradition from the Lötschental Valley to explore how similar masked rituals respond to globalization, tourism, and heritage-making. The central research question asks how locally rooted ritual practices adapt to external pressures and how commodification alters their meanings, functions, and relationship with local communities.

The study employs a multidisciplinary methodology combining historical sources, ethnographic fieldwork, and contemporary media analysis. Early descriptions, particularly those recorded by the traveler Masumi Sugae in the early nineteenth century, provide a historical baseline for tracing changes in the ritual. These are compared with contemporary representations found in regional newspapers, official tourism websites, and promotional materials, as well as with participant observation conducted during Namahage-related events. The analysis is informed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's concept of heritage as a socially constructed and continually reinterpreted process and Catherine Bell's theory of ritualization, which highlights the relationship between ritual practice, social identity and changing historical contexts.

Preliminary findings suggest that Namahage has undergone substantial transformation through tourism and heritage commodification. The growth of the Namahage-Sedō Matsuri as a major tourist attraction illustrates the shift from an intimate community ritual toward a staged performance designed for external audiences. Although the tradition continues to reinforce local identity, its original religious and social functions have increasingly been reinterpreted within the framework of regional development and cultural consumption.

Comparison with the Swiss Tschäggättä reveals similar patterns despite the absence of historical connections. Both traditions originated as locally embedded seasonal rituals associated with communal cohesion and liminal transitions, yet both have been reshaped by heritage policies, tourism, and commercialization. In both cases, state institutions and local stakeholders actively promote these practices as valuable cultural assets while simultaneously negotiating questions of authenticity and community ownership.

By combining historical analysis with contemporary ethnography and international comparison, this research contributes to broader debates on intangible cultural heritage, globalization, and the commodification of tradition. It argues that the transformation of Namahage reflects wider processes through which local rituals are continuously redefined in response to changing social, economic, and political traditions.



Future research will extend this comparative framework to additional European masked traditions, including Krampus, Perchten, and Kukeri, to situate Namahage within a broader transnational perspective on ritual adaptation and heritage-making.

11:00–11:45 (CET) / 19:00–19:45 (JST) KATŌ Chika (Kansai University) “Divergence of Discourse and Action in the Kyoto School Big Four during Wartime in Japan (1942–1944): Reconsidering Published Discourse, Covert Activity, and the Information Environment”

Among the philosophers of the ‘Kyoto School’, centred at Kyoto Imperial University before the war, the so-called ‘Kyoto School Big Four’ (Keiji Nishitani, Masaaki Kōsaka, Iwao Kōyama, and Shigetaka Suzuki) are the most well-known as a group. Evaluations of these four have long been linked to the issue of their ‘wartime collaboration’. Beyond the matter of individual biography, this case raises broader questions regarding how intellectuals negotiate their public and private positions vis-à-vis state power under wartime censorship and information control. Their published writings from the war years—especially their historical discourse centred on the ‘philosophy of world history’—contain expressions that align with state ideology and appear to justify Japan’s war effort. These include roundtable discussions in which some of them participated, such as *Overcoming Modernity* (1942) and *The Standpoint of World History and Japan* (1943, in which all four participated), and essays in the *Theory of World History* (Sekaishi Koza, Vol. 1, 1944).

However, as Ryōsuke Ōhashi argues, based on the ‘Ōshima Notes’ (2001), these four thinkers held secret meetings with Imperial Navy personnel between 1942 and 1944, actively exploring measures to curb the war’s escalation and seeking political interventions. Remarkably, this covert activity coincided with a period when public discourse was read as an endorsement of war.

Why did these individuals articulate a philosophy of history in their published writings that justified the state and war while secretly working to criticise and restrain the conduct and expansion of the war? This presentation treats the ‘1942–1944 divergence’ not as duplicity or self-protective posturing but as a clue to something inherent in their philosophical thought. It seeks to clarify the conditions under which this thought is manifested in these two seemingly opposing forms.

The analysis was conducted in three ways to address this question. First, it examines four thinkers’ publications, articles, and roundtable discussions from 1942 to 1944 to reconstruct how they conceptualised the state and the war. Second, it draws on historical documents such as the ‘Ōshima Notes’, tracing the course of their secret meetings with naval officers, identifying their political interventions or means of restraining the war, and examining how these efforts related to their public statements. Third, it reconstructs political and social conditions—including censorship and police surveillance—as well as the media and information environment, situating both public discourse and covert activity within a shared historical context.

Through this analysis, the presentation argues that the philosophy of world history developed by the ‘Kyoto School Big Four’ could simultaneously sustain a theoretical affirmation of the state and practical resistance to the war’s escalation. By reassessing the thought and action of the Kyoto School Big Four during 1942–1944 in this light, the presentation ultimately illuminates both the possibilities and limitations inherent in their ‘philosophy of world history’.



Bildung und Erziehung / Education

09:30 Uhr bis 13:00 Uhr / 09:30 a.m. to 13:00 a.m. (CET) / 17:30 to 21:30 (JST)

The section meeting «Education» at the annual conference of the German Association for Social Science Research on Japan (VSJF) is a network for (young) researchers and students interested in education in Japan, but also for people outside the academic context. Our aim is to provide an opportunity to engage with the topic of education and its political and social implications in the Japanese context and to promote exchange between people from different backgrounds. We see ourselves as a forum for young scholars and students to present their research (from finished papers to work-in-progress) and benefit from feedback from senior scholars and the interested public.

For further information please refer to <https://vsjf.net/die-vsjf/fachgruppen/fachgruppe-bildung-und-erziehung/> or contact me at vincent.lesch@zo.uni-heidelberg.de or education@vsjf.net

Zoom for Online-Participation:

Meeting-Link: <https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/j/64503407096?pwd=bIG6U9pLBwFrPXd3tgudRdJXo0SwQd.1>

Meeting-ID: 645 0340 7096

Password: 223499

Zoom Etiquette: Participants can enter and leave the meeting by themselves. Permission from the host is not necessary. Please turn off your microphone when you are not speaking to avoid noise interference etc.

Opening remarks

Vincent B. LESCH, Heidelberg University

How do financial disadvantages experienced by single-mother households in Japan impact upon their children's educational outcomes? An exploratory qualitative study

Hitomi IMAMURA, University of West London (alumna)

Child poverty in Japan, particularly among single-mother households, remains an important yet comparatively under-researched issue. Despite Japan's relatively low overall poverty rates, single mothers and their children face significant economic and social disadvantages. Educational inequalities have been further reinforced by the 2020 education reform, which increased access to private education for children from wealthier families and thereby contributed to a widening educational gap.

A qualitative approach was used to examine the causes of poverty and its effects on children's educational and career trajectories. Interviews were conducted with representatives of seven NPOs, eight single mothers, and ten adult children from single-mother households. The findings indicate that economic disadvantage has a negative impact on children's learning performance and educational opportunities. Furthermore, psychological strain emerged as an important consequence of poverty for both parents and children. In particular, children reported experiencing stigma and psychological difficulties associated with parental divorce and their family circumstances.



Overall, the findings demonstrate that poverty among single-mother households is shaped by interconnected economic, educational, and psychological factors. Addressing these disparities requires measures that support affected families and contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Japan's Educational System as a Social Mobility Regime

Shinichi AIZAWA, Sophia University, Tokyo

This article examines the historical development of Japan's educational system through the concept of a social mobility regime. It addresses why the social consequences of educational expansion differ across societies despite increasing similarities in formal educational structures. The analysis argues that these differences result from historically developed configurations of educational institutions, selection mechanisms, labor market evaluation, normative expectations, and market-based educational services.

The development of Japan's social mobility regime is divided into three historical phases. During the Meiji and pre-war periods, a credential-based educational order emerged as a new form of social hierarchy in the context of industrialization. Private preparatory institutions such as yobikō and juku already played an important role in facilitating access to selective educational pathways. The postwar period and high-growth era subsequently strengthened the legitimacy of education as a means of upward social mobility. From the 1970s onward, the expansion of upper secondary education, increasing university entrance competition, and demographic and structural changes transformed the regime without fundamentally altering its underlying logic.

A central finding is that private educational providers became a constitutive part of Japan's educational mobility regime by organizing preparation, selection, and transitions between educational stages. This contrasts with Germany, where educational and occupational pathways are more strongly structured through state-regulated qualification systems. The Japanese case demonstrates that educational systems differ not only in their formal structures but also in how access to social mobility is institutionally organized and practically secured.

Mobilization of Social-Emotional Skills in Access to Study Abroad among Japanese Young Adults

Naho YOSHIKAWA, University of Zurich

This study examines social-emotional skills as a potential mechanism of social stratification in Japan's transition from education to employment, focusing on their role in access to study abroad. As selection processes increasingly value skills beyond academic achievement, study abroad may provide opportunities to accumulate and demonstrate social-emotional skills, extracurricular experience, and foreign language abilities. At the same time, access to such opportunities may already be shaped by socioeconomic background, cognitive skills, social support, and previous experiences.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital and the Cumulative Advantage Thesis, the study investigates how Japanese young adults mobilize social-emotional skills alongside individual, social, and institutional resources to access study abroad. Particular attention is given to atypical trajectories, including low-SES individuals with strong social-emotional skills and high-SES individuals with weaker social-emotional skills. The study employs a mixed-method



comparative design based on the three-year Japan Transnational Education and Career Panel Study (JTEPS), combining quantitative data from approximately 2,000 young adults with qualitative interviews.

Preliminary quantitative findings from approximately 500 participants indicate that individuals with previous study-abroad experience report higher levels of social-emotional skills, particularly among those who studied abroad for more than one year. Further qualitative research will examine how different combinations of resources and skills shape access to study abroad and contribute to unequal educational and career opportunities in Japan.

Teacher Vulnerability as a Relational Experience: Life-Histories of Japanese Junior High School Teachers

Sayaka SAITO, University College London

This study examines how Japanese junior high school teachers experience and negotiate professional responsibility and vulnerability within a demanding institutional context characterised by long working hours, broad responsibilities, and teacher shortages. Adopting a life-history approach, the study draws on the experiences of six teachers at a Japanese junior high school. Data were collected through preliminary surveys and one- to two-hour semi-structured online interviews in Japanese, supported by individual timelines that facilitated reflection on participants' professional experiences.

The findings identify three contexts in which teachers' vulnerability becomes particularly pronounced: early-career homeroom management, tensions between personal educational beliefs and institutional expectations, and school transfers. Whole-person education and the mandatory teacher rotation system emerge as important institutional conditions shaping these experiences. While these structures can provide opportunities for professional learning, they may also disrupt established relationships, increase uncertainty, and intensify emotional and professional vulnerability.

Relationships with students, parents, and colleagues are central to how teachers navigate responsibility and vulnerability. Relational support can transform vulnerability into opportunities for professional learning and growth, whereas limited support and highly individualised responsibility may contribute to emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and isolation. Teacher vulnerability is therefore shaped not only by individual experiences but also by relational and institutional conditions. The findings highlight the potential importance of collaborative approaches to sharing responsibility and strengthening teachers' relational resources across different career stages.

*****SHORT BREAK*****

“This Feels Very Japanese” - Value Formation among Japanese Parents in Sweden and Japan

Hazuki OKAMOTO, Stockholm University

This study examines how Japanese parents living in Japan and Sweden transmit values to their children and understand their moral development. Drawing on the concepts of “parental ethnotheories” and “learning theory,” it explores how different cultural and social environments



shape approaches to value education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 Japanese parents, including five living in Japan and six living in Sweden.

The findings show that parents in Japan emphasized learning social rules, cooperation, and consideration for others through school and community activities. Everyday practices, such as greeting others, as well as extracurricular activities like kendo, were viewed as important means of developing desirable attitudes and values. Japanese parents in Sweden, by contrast, became more aware of their cultural background through their experiences in a multicultural society. They frequently reflected on Japanese values and explicitly described certain attitudes and practices as distinctively Japanese.

The findings suggest that parental values are not simply inherited from a culture of origin but are continuously reconstructed through social experiences and cultural contexts. While parents in Japan largely transmitted values through everyday practices within a relatively homogeneous environment, those in Sweden reflected on and reinterpreted these values in a multicultural setting. The comparison highlights the dynamic nature of parental value education in intercultural contexts.

Japanese Language Education Abroad as an Instrument of Japan's Public Diplomacy: The Case of Poland

Jakub Zajfert, Polish-Japanese Academy of Computer Science (PJATK)

This paper examines Japanese-language education abroad as a long-term instrument of Japan's public diplomacy, using Poland as a case study. Rather than viewing language education solely as language pedagogy, international education, or cultural exchange, it is understood as an educational infrastructure that can create sustained engagement with Japan, its society, culture, institutions, and patterns of communication.

The analysis focuses on the role of Japanese institutions, particularly the Japan Foundation, and examines how governmental and educational actors support language learning through teacher training, educational materials, standards, mobility programmes, and academic exchange. Japanese-language education can contribute to long-term relationship-building by fostering cultural familiarity, knowledge production, and institutional cooperation. Learners may maintain connections with Japan over several years and later become teachers, researchers, translators, employees of Japanese companies, or other professionals with continuing links to Japan.

At the same time, the influence of Japanese institutions is neither direct nor unidirectional. Japanese educational initiatives are implemented within local educational environments, where universities, teachers, curricula, and learners mediate and adapt them to local conditions. The paper therefore highlights the importance of balancing standardization with localization. The effectiveness of educational public diplomacy depends not only on institutional support from Japan but also on the adaptability of educational frameworks to local needs.

**Portrayal of Social Change in School Textbooks: A Comparison of Türkiye and Japan**

Hacer Elmaci, University of Leeds

This study examines the processes of modernisation and social change in Türkiye and Japan, focusing on how these developments are represented and legitimised in school textbooks. Modernisation is understood as a multidimensional process involving industrialisation, economic transformation, secularisation, increased social and geographical mobility, the expansion of scientific and technical education, changes from inherited to achieved status, and improvements in living standards. Using qualitative research methods, the study analyses social studies and history textbooks from primary, secondary, and high schools in both countries. Qualitative content and discourse analyses were conducted on texts and images related to modernisation.

The findings are organised around four main themes: economic transformation, the expansion of mass education, changes in women's social status, and transformations in social values and culture. In both countries, modernisation is portrayed in relation to the political, social, and economic conditions of the respective historical periods. Cultural change is primarily represented through changes in clothing and increases in cultural capital. However, significant differences emerge in the depiction of social change. Turkish textbooks largely present modernisation as a process initiated and implemented by the state, with limited attention to its effects on the everyday behaviour, attitudes, habits, and social lives of ordinary people. Japanese textbooks, in contrast, place greater emphasis on how modernisation affected everyday life and address the social problems that emerged alongside these transformations.

Final discussion and closing remarks



Kultur, Medien und Kommunikation / Culture, Media and Communication

09:30 Uhr bis 13:00 Uhr / 09:30 a.m. to 13:00 a.m. (CET) / 17:30 to 21:30 (JST)

Organizers:

Dr. Michaela Oberwinkler (Düsseldorf University)

Dr. Jasmin Rückert (Düsseldorf University)

Online participants can log in via Webex:

<https://hhu.webex.com/hhu/j.php?MTID=m6db33108e38fdb62d5849e57ad5cd213>

Meeting-ID: 2784 626 8295, Meeting password: 8CMrwmKTh73

Presentations:

9:30 – 11:00

Who Wins Where? Stratification and Career Strategies of Japanese Musicians and Dancers in Central Europe

Lenka Vyleťalová, Palacký University Olomouc (in person)

Between Isolation and Close Contact: Virtual Poetic Spaces during COVID-19

Sarah Pützer, Oxford University (in person)

The Vocabulary of Order: Migration and the Boundaries of the Nation in Takaichi-Era Media Discourse

Arina Sydorkina, University of Kielce (in person)

11:00 – 11:30 *Coffee break*

11:30 – 13:00

Relationalizing Sacred Space: Human and Non-human Actants in the Nachi Fire Festival

Beiye Ma, Heidelberg University/Kyoto University (in person)

Beyond the “religious wife”: preliminary observations from fieldwork at Japanese new religions’ women’s associations

Marzia Alteno, Université de Montréal (online)



Abstracts

Who Wins Where? Stratification and Career Strategies of Japanese Musicians and Dancers in Central Europe

Lenka Vyleťalová, Palacký University Olomouc (in person)

This paper investigates how Japanese professional musicians and ballet dancers navigate professional mobility within European art worlds, focusing on the interplay between their emergent career strategies and the social meanings attached to skills. Given the increasingly diverse mobility trajectories of young middle-class Japanese, the study argues that understanding contemporary artistic mobility requires attention not only to structural opportunities but also to how skills are differently valorised across contexts — and across professional fields characterised by precarity, clustering effects, and winner-take-all dynamics.

Empirically, the paper draws on qualitative data combining previous research with young Japanese middle-class professionals with overseas education and work experience, and new interview and questionnaire data with professional musicians and ballet dancers active in the Czech Republic. These two groups illustrate the distinctive pathways through which Japanese cultural professionals engage with Central European art worlds, and the varied strategies through which they build careers, navigate precarious labour markets, and develop long-term trajectories within them.

Analytically, the study draws on the concepts of mobility capital and motility to illuminate how artists accumulate and deploy the capacity for movement as a career resource, and on scholarship on the social construction of migrant skills to explain how technical competencies are evaluated differently depending on labour market norms and cultural expectations. These perspectives are complemented by attention to lifestyle migration and transnationalism as frameworks capturing the non-economic, identity-driven, and open-ended dimensions of artistic mobility.

This allows the paper to explore how participants' internationally acquired skills are interpreted, recognised, or discounted within European art worlds, and how these evaluations shape aspirations to stay, re-migrate, or return to Japan. By foregrounding skill as a socially mediated construct embedded within specific migration infrastructure — including institutional recruitment channels, artist visa frameworks, conservatoire networks, and transnational Japanese communities — the paper demonstrates how mobility decisions are inseparable from the negotiation of professional identity across cultural boundaries.

Between Isolation and Close Contact: Virtual Poetic Spaces during COVID-19

Sarah Pützer, Oxford University

This paper explores the intersection of poetry, virtual space, and the COVID-19 pandemic through two creative online projects: *Ōfukurōdoku* (往復朗読, A Circle of Reading, 2020–2021) by Aoyagi Natsumi and Sato Tomoko, as well as *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* (隔離式濃厚接触室, Isolated Intensive Contact Room, 2020) by Fuse Rintarō and Mizusawa Nao. With in-person events largely cancelled or postponed, the paper examines how livestreams and a



restricted-access website shaped audience experiences between connection and solitude. Drawing on audience responses gathered from articles, blog posts, and tweets, it argues that these virtual poetic spaces should not be understood as substitutes for physical events, but rather as offering distinctive aesthetic experiences in their own right – shaped by the pandemic and its effects on spatial perception.

The Vocabulary of Order: Migration and the Boundaries of the Nation in Takaichi-Era Media Discourse

Arina Sydorkina, University of Kielce

Since the 2018 revision of the Immigration Control Act, labour migration has become a central arena for negotiating Japanese national identity. The Takaichi cabinet, formed in October 2025, created a ministerial portfolio for 外国人との秩序ある共生社会推進 (gaikokujin to no chitsujo aru kyōsei shakai suishin, "promotion of a society of orderly coexistence with foreign nationals") and in January 2026 adopted a policy package that defines order as the foundation of coexistence.

The paper makes no claims about Japanese culture or mentality. It treats 和 (wa, harmony) as a historically constructed concept, approached through the texts that defined it. Nihonjinron writings of the 1970s and 1980s presented wa as a defining trait of Japanese society and a marker separating Japanese from non-Japanese. Critical scholarship has shown that these claims lacked empirical grounding (Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Befu 2001; Oguma 2002; see also Vlastos 1998). The paper asks whether current migration discourse recontextualises this boundary-marking function without naming wa.

Using the Discourse-Historical Approach, it analyses government statements, migration coverage in Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri and Sankei Shimbun, and public reactions on X and YouTube. The semantic field of wa is reconstructed from Nihonjinron texts and fixed in a codebook before coding. The analysis distinguishes two uses of 秩序 (chitsujo, order): legal order (crime, visa status) and social conduct within the community (waste disposal, noise, trouble to neighbours).

Preliminary analysis of government texts shows a consistent vocabulary of 秩序, 不安・不公平 (fuan, fukōhei, anxiety and unfairness), 迷惑行為 (meiwaku kōi, behaviour that troubles others) and 毅然 (kizen, resolute), while 和 is almost entirely absent. The working hypothesis is that the vocabulary of order recontextualises components that Nihonjinron attached to wa: rule-following, group cohesion and avoidance of trouble to others. It would be weakened if order is framed mainly in legal terms, if wa is equally absent from earlier policy documents, or if similar vocabulary is equally prominent in migration discourses elsewhere. The paper presents the data for discussion, including how the absence of wa can be interpreted and whether this discourse is specific to Japan.



Relationalizing Sacred Space: Human and Non-human Actants in the Nachi Fire Festival

Beiye Ma, Heidelberg University/Kyoto University

The research examines the Nachi Fire Festival (Nachi no Ōgi Matsuri) at Kumano Nachi Taisha, a religious site historically formed through the entanglement of Shinto and Buddhist traditions. The site has often been understood through the historical frameworks of shinbutsu shūgō (the syncretism of kami and buddhas) and shinbutsu bunri (the separation of kami and buddhas). My presentation introduces a relational perspective to examine how contemporary ritual practice is constituted within sacred space.

Drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and participant observation conducted during the 2026 festival, I trace how ritual performance assembles a continuously evolving network of human and non-human actants. Instead of treating religious categories or boundaries as fixed, I ask how participants, ritual objects, landscape, water, fire, and commercial practices become related to one another and are gradually enrolled into the ritual network.

Water and fire in the site provide particularly revealing examples. Purification water becomes a plaything for children nowadays, the waterfall plays an important role in ritual performance, and the same substance is packaged and sold as "life-prolonging water" in the shrine's shop. Water therefore circulates between purification, play, sacred presence, and commerce, and it acquires different meanings through its changing relations. Fire, used in the ritual performance, points toward what remains absent from the festival's official narrative by evoking associations with the purificatory fire of Buddhist goma rites.

These shifting composition suggest that the boundaries between Shinto and Buddhism, the sacred and the secular, and human and non-human are not simply given. Rather, they are continuously negotiated through ritual relations. The case of the Nachi Fire Festival therefore offers a way to move beyond fixed religious categories and to reconsider contemporary Japanese ritual as an ongoing accomplishment of heterogeneous human, non-human, material, and environmental relations.

Beyond the "religious wife": preliminary observations from fieldwork at Japanese new religions' women's associations

Marzia Alteno, Université de Montréal

There is a tendency in scholarship on Japanese new religions to examine women occupying religious spaces through their relationships to husbands, sons, fathers, or other male religious figures. However, comparatively less attention has been paid to women who occupy leadership positions in women's associations, known as fujinkai, established within Japanese new religious movements. This paper aims to analytically approach women as religious actors in their own right, rather than primarily as relational figures defined through their relationships with men. Drawing on ongoing fieldwork at Tenrikyō's headquarters and local branches, I explore how female religious authority is produced, recognized, and experienced in everyday religious practice. I analyze a form of female religious authority that exists alongside the public formal institutional authority and that is established by the relationship between the women's association leader and ordinary practitioners. I want to investigate



what these women actually do and how practitioners relate to them, and I suggest that this perspective can reveal forms of women's religious authority that are obscured by male-centered internal dynamics.

This paper examines how we can understand women as religious actors who occupy leadership positions, exercise authority, and develop relationships with practitioners; how women leaders of fujinkai function as local religious authorities within a hierarchically structured Japanese new religious movement; what kinds of relationships women leaders and practitioners share; and what this relationship reveals about gender division of labor in new religions and women's distinctive forms of religious authority.



Politik / Political Sciences

09:30 Uhr bis 13:00 Uhr / 09:30 a.m. to 13:00 a.m. (CET) / 17:30 to 21:30 (JST)

Organizers:

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer (Universität Wien) & Anna-Viktoria Vittinghoff (University Sheffield)

Zoom:

<https://univienne.zoom.us/j/66290242586?pwd=bpcFreZ6luUJzxcHbrHRUe7YQ057sl.1>

(ohne Registrierung möglich / no registration necessary)

Saturday, 14. November 2026

Time Slot	Presenter	Topic
09:30-11:00	Jaein Seol (Universität Leipzig) (online)	Revisionist Narratives across the Border: Korean Voices in the Japanese Right-Wing Discursive Arena
	Johanna Fritzi Momm (Freie Universität Berlin)	Mapping Human Rights Discourse in Japan: Directions & Fields
	Stefan Schuler (Universität Leipzig)	Mapping the Rearmament-Discourse within Japanese News: Discourse-Network-Analysis on Reform of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution
	Erik Isaksson (Freie Universität Berlin)	In Agreement on Power: Narratives of World Order by Rightwing Populists and Mainstream Actors in Japan
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30-13:00	Sian Qin (Ludwig- Maximilians-Universität München), Yuko NIKAIDO (Notre Dame Seishin University)	Twinning Agreements (shimai shūken) in Building Migration Infrastructure for the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP): From a Symbol of International Cooperation to a Strategy for Securing International Migrant Workers in Rural Japan
	Hamamoto Atsushi (Waseda University)	Project Protraction in Japan: Path Dependence and Lock-in in Dam Development
	Nakahara Junki (University of Amsterdam)	Japan's "new" anticommunism: security apparatuses, discourses, and actors
	Andreas Eder-Ramsauer (Universität Wien)	The People as Crisis: Kōyama Ken'ichi, Post- Oil Shock 1970s Conservatism, and the Strategic Deployment of Anti-Populism



Abstracts

Revisionist Narratives across the Border: Korean Voices in the Japanese Right-Wing Discursive Arena

Jaein Seol (Universität Leipzig) (online)

Disputes over the colonial and wartime past have long shaped relations between Japan and South Korea. Beyond bilateral relations, the interpretation of this past remains contested within both countries, and historical revisionism has become an influential framework for reinterpreting it, often in the name of “historical truth.” What is notable is that revisionist narratives have increasingly crossed the border between the two countries since the 2000s. Intellectuals in South Korea associated with the “New Right” have advanced narratives similar to Japanese revisionist claims to challenge dominant South Korean nationalist narratives of the colonial past, while Japanese right-wing actors have increasingly taken up these Korean voices. This raises the question of how revisionist narratives circulate between Japan and South Korea and how they are reproduced and reinforced in each country. This paper approaches this cross-border circulation from the Japanese side. Drawing on preliminary findings from archival research in Tokyo, based primarily on articles from Japanese right-wing opinion magazines such as *Seiron*, *Shokun!*, *WILL*, *Hanada*, and *SAPIO*, it examines who the Korean revisionists are, what narratives they have produced, and how both their narratives and the speakers themselves have been framed within the Japanese right-wing discursive arena, with a particular focus on the period since 2000.

Mapping Human Rights Discourse in Japan: Directions & Fields

Johanna Fritzi Momm (Freie Universität Berlin)

Mapping Human Rights Discourse in Japan: Directions & Fields Human rights in Japan are seldom spoken about the same way. Statements range from leaning on international human rights law to empty window-washing and even equalling human rights to an insult. My presentation will cover the different human rights narratives that I have encountered during my fieldwork. On the basis of expert interviews with politicians, lawyers, bureaucrats, academics, journalists, activists, and people who experienced human rights violations, I transcribed and qualitatively analysed the contents of my recordings with MaxQDA. I will map out what my interlocutors understand to be the role of human rights, what human rights fields they see as most important, and which direction human rights development in Japanese politics are going. Depending on who I asked, human rights stagnated, developed gradually either positively or negatively and some say they have never even properly existed. Understanding how different groups of people frame human rights is vital for problem-solving, coalition-building, and what points to focus upon when it comes to norm research in Japan.

Mapping the Rearmament-Discourse within Japanese News: Discourse-Network-Analysis on Reform of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

Stefan Schuler (Universität Leipzig)

On April 12th, Sanae Takaichi made clear her objective to reform the constitution of Japan, a long-standing goal of the LDP. It is still unclear whether she can bring her party and coalition partner to support her demands. Nonetheless, the deterioration of the post-war global order



and the landslide victory of the LDP have created the perfect environment for constitutional reform to take place. Similarly to the parliament, the public is just as divided over whether constitutional reform is necessary or not. Most notably regarding Article 9. No big surprise, as the pacifist stance of the post-war constitution has been positioned as one of the greatest virtues of modern Japan. Anyone aiming to change one of the pillars of post-war Japan fights an uphill battle. The arena of constitutional reform has become one of the most discussed fields of Japanese politics. Political parties and other actors must rely on the media to spread their arguments to the public. In this process, clear coalitions between both political and societal actors emerge, indicating the direction in which the discourse is going. How then has the discourse in Japan regarding Article 9 shifted before and after Takaichi has taken office? Employing the method of Discourse-Network-Analysis using the tool by Philip Leifeld, this research will visualize the discourse coalitions visible within Japanese News-Media. This approach makes it possible to identify and quantitatively map out the discourse surrounding Article 9 and rearmament, showing which topoi are employed and which actors are most represented within Japanese News-Media, allowing a qualitative analysis to connect the current discourse with over-arching discussions on history and historical responsibility within Japan.

In Agreement on Power: Narratives of World Order by Rightwing Populists and Mainstream Actors in Japan

Erik Isaksson (Freie Universität Berlin)

How do narratives of rightwing populist actors depend on already deeply institutionalized and more broadly shared narratives of power? Research on populist world order narratives identify them as challenging dominant narratives of, for example, “liberal international order”, showing how the prevalence of the former might herald an unraveling of present world orders. This, however, only tells part of the story. Neat categorizations of domestic (often party political) actors into populists and mainstream downplay the similarities in worldviews between these actors, similarities that are buoyed by agreement about how these two groups both envision the role of power. This comes with implications for the practice of international relations. The dominant view that domestic rightwing populists are overturning an international order that its proponents see as promoting freedom and egalitarianism masks the deep continuities between existing orders and those preferred by rightwing populists, namely one where the strong dominates. This paper aims to show how these narrative similarities are constituted. It does so by examining domestic narratives about Japan’s international engagement. Japan is particularly well suited for this type of analysis as it has long been viewed as a “populism-free” polity and is as such often treated in research and commentary as an ideal defender of free and egalitarian international orders. The paper conducts discourse analysis of narratives espoused by leading politicians in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), including speeches by the prime minister, and influential research and advisory actors in the LDP orbit on the one hand, and of narratives espoused by two recent upstart, smaller rightwing populist parties like Sanseito and the Japan Conservative Party on the other. Through the analysis, the paper shows how while specific preferences on international policy may differ, the underlying notion that the strong should secure its position in an international hierarchy characterized by zero-sum competition remains the same between the ruling party milieu and that around the small populist parties. The paper’s findings expand our understanding of the shared denominators between populist and establishment narratives within states, drawing attention to the broadly unsustainable configuration of (hierarchical) current world orders.

**Twinning Agreements (shimai shūken) in Building Migration Infrastructure for the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP): From a Symbol of International Cooperation to a Strategy for Securing International Migrant Workers in Rural Japan**

Sian Qin (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), Yuko NIKAIDO (Notre Dame Seishin University)

As international migrant workers tend to concentrate in Japan's megacities, rural communities far from urban areas often face structural unattractiveness and vulnerability. To secure a sufficient migrant workforce in rural areas, local governments are devising unique strategies by drawing on a variety of innovative approaches, including but not limited to twinning agreements. Applying "migration infrastructure" theory (Xiang and Lindquist 2014), this paper comparatively analyzes two subnational cases, both involving TITPs in the agricultural sector. It compares Oita City/Oita Prefecture and Wuhan City/Hubei Province in China, with Suzaki City/Kochi Prefecture and Benguet Province in the Philippines. Despite similar long-standing international exchange activities in the agricultural sector since the 1970s, the local governments in both peripheral areas interpret their twinning agreements differently when accepting agricultural technical interns. While local governments in Japan can create migration infrastructure that serves as a de facto selective tool by activating the legacy of twinning agreements, as shown in the Philippine case, the conditions in the sending society may also limit the types of infrastructure they can establish, as shown in the case of China. Before the TITP is replaced by the "Employment for Skills Development" (ikusei shurō), our paper seeks to clarify the dividing line between local governments' efforts to promote international cooperation and their efforts to secure the workforce by accepting international migrant workers in the agricultural sector. Finally, we discuss the potential of local government-led international activities to shape migration flows.

Project Protraction in Japan: Path Dependence and Lock-in in Dam Development (in person)

Hamamoto Atsushi (Prof., Waseda University, hamamoto@waseda.jp)

This presentation examines why infrastructure projects in Japan take so long to reach completion or definitive closure, focusing on the institutional and political mechanisms that produce their protraction. The Tokaido Shinkansen, inaugurated in 1964, was completed only eight years after full-scale planning and investigation began, and about five years after the start of construction. It became a symbol of Japan's infrastructure development during its period of rapid economic growth. In recent decades, however, some infrastructure projects in Japan, particularly dams, have taken more than half a century to complete. More recently, there have also been concerns about substantial delays in completing the maglev train project between Tokyo and Osaka. To explain project protraction, the presentation draws primarily on the concepts of path dependence and lock-in in megaproject research. Path dependence refers here to the process by which earlier decisions shape subsequent choices and progressively narrow the range of feasible alternatives. Lock-in describes the resulting condition in which abandoning an established project or shifting to an alternative becomes extremely difficult. It can be reinforced by sunk costs, escalating commitment, the need to justify earlier decisions, and the closure of alternatives (Cantarelli et al., 2010). The relationship between lock-in and project protraction, however, is not straightforward. Projects may proceed slowly, remain in limbo for extended periods, or survive suspension, attempted termination, redesign, and reactivation.



Trust and distrust may provide an additional perspective on project protraction. Research on social impact assessment (SIA) and the social licence to operate (SLO) emphasises legitimacy, credibility, and trust in relations between project proponents and affected communities (Vanclay et al., 2015). Research on German nuclear waste policy shows how prolonged conflict and mutual distrust can paralyse decision-making (Hocke and Renn, 2009). More broadly, sociological theories of trust and STS research on relations between experts and publics provide further perspectives for understanding how such conflicts develop and persist. The analysis focuses on the Ishiki (石木), Yamba (八ッ場), and Kawabegawa (川辺川) dam projects in Japan. All three have encountered well-organised opposition, making it difficult to attribute their protraction simply to a weak civil society. Their trajectories nevertheless differ: continuing confrontation in Ishiki; attempted termination followed by resumption and completion in Yamba; and the re-emergence of a redesigned dam project after apparent policy closure in Kawabegawa. By comparing these trajectories, the presentation examines whether project protraction in Japan is produced by distinctive institutions or by a particular configuration of more widely shared mechanisms.

Japan's "new" anticommunism: security apparatuses, discourses, and actors

Junki Nakahara (University of Amsterdam)

This study examines contemporary anticommunist state apparatuses, discourses, and actors, as well as the underlying logics of Red Scare with Japanese characteristics, through an analysis of National Diet speeches and Twitter/X posts. Drawing on illustrative examples, it shows how anticommunist ideology interplays with nationalism to delineate what is considered legitimate—politically, economically, and culturally—within the nation and what is not. The analysis finds that the floating nature of communism as a signifier is exploited to banalize other ideologies such as xenophobia/racism, anti-immigration, and anti-LGBTQ. The significance of anticommunism as a governmental, moral, and affective “common sense” lies in its power to draw a line between “good” citizen-subject, who enjoy obedience and find (national) pride in self-restraint, diligence, and moderation, and “disobedient” others, who may pose an ideological and material threat to the nation. It contributes to the subjugation of internal dissent and the containment of popular sovereign struggle by shaming disorder and (re)legitimizing state security apparatuses, constituting the nation’s democratic modernity that is fundamentally authoritarian and conservative to this day.

The People as Crisis: Kōyama Ken'ichi, Post-Oil Shock 1970s Conservatism, and the Strategic Deployment of Anti-Populism

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer (Universität Wien)

Early 1970s Japan saw a culmination of crises that put conservatism on the backfoot. Pollution, urban congestion and labor rights struggles all imbedded a sense of urgent reaction among young conservatives, such as political scientist Kōyama Ken'ichi. The paper traces the ideational trajectory of young conservatives like Kōyama since they were central in the reaction to the destabilizing moment in conservative hegemony. Later becoming a crucial advisor to such people as PM Nakasone Yasuhiro or PM Hosokawa Morihiro, Kōyama is an often overlooked or misread political figure in Japanese postwar history. A discourse theoretical reading of his intervention points to a central logic behind his activities to be anti-populism, a disregard and fear of “the masses” as entitled democratic subjects. The early 1970s are



identified as a crucial moment in which this logic was put front-and-center in conservative reasoning in decades to come.



Soziologie/Sozialanthropologie / Sociology/Social Anthropology

09:30 Uhr bis 13:00 Uhr / 09:30 a.m. to 13:00 a.m. (CET) / 17:30 to 21:30 (JST)

Organizers:

Harald CONRAD (Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf)

Steve R. ENTRICH (University of Zurich)

Carola HOMMERICH (Sophia University)

Program

9:30 – 11:00

Session 1:

“Migration, Education, and Unequal Life-Course Transitions in and beyond Japan”

20 min. per talk (15 min. presentation + 5 min. discussion)

09:30 to 11:00 (CET) / 17:30 to 19:00 (JST)

Chair: Steve R. ENTRICH (University of Zurich)

Join us also online, via Zoom:

<https://uzh.zoom.us/j/63612559049?pwd=jCDSyaNtmW8Za5UvPj32wQZRkbL16u.1>

Meeting-ID: 636 1255 9049

Kenncode: 255479

Paper 1 "Negotiating Multilingualism: The management of language diversity in Japan's primary and lower secondary schools" (in person)

Julian WOLLINGER (University of Vienna)

Paper 2 "How Karihomen Youths or Youths Who Have a Karihomen Family Member Decide Their Future Course after High School Graduation? " (in person)

Riko SHIBUYA (University of Tokyo)

Paper 3 "Community-Based Support Structures and Immigrant Second-Generation Career Formation: A Japan-South Korea Comparison" (in person)

Gijung SONG (Nagoya University)

Paper 4 "Reworking the Life Course across Borders: Japanese and Chinese Young Adults in Singapore" (online)

Kexuan LI (National University of Singapore)

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break



11:30 – 13:00

Session 2 (parallel session: Sociology Section):
“Gender, Voice, and Social Change in Contemporary Japan”
 20 min. per talk (15 min. presentation + 5 min. discussion)
 11:30 to 13:00 (CET) / 19:30 to 21:00 (JST)

Chair: Steve R. ENTRICH (University of Zurich)

Join us also online, via Zoom:

<https://uzh.zoom.us/j/63612559049?pwd=jCDSyaNtmW8Za5UvPj32wQZRkbL16u.1>

Meeting-ID: 636 1255 9049

Kenncode: 255479

Paper 5 **“The Flower Demo: new ways for speaking out” (in person)**

Chiara FUSARI (University of Zurich)

Paper 6 **“Gendered Life Courses, Labor, and Knowledge in Contemporary Japanese Fortune-Telling” (in person)**

Shoko KUROKAWA (University of Tokyo)

Paper 7 **“Exploring Life Satisfaction among Foreign Residents in Japan: A Quantitative Analysis through the Lens of Social Capital” (in person)**

Tobias KLEINSCHMIDT (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Paper 8 **“Tackling Climate Change without Climate Action? Shaping Transition through Neighbourhood Initiatives in Tokyo” (online)**

Louise Hirao-Vermare (University of Ottawa)

Session 3 (parallel session: Economy Section):
“Local Economies in Transition: Work, Enterprise, and Social Change in Japan”
 20 min. per talk (15 min. presentation + 5 min. discussion)
 11:30 to 13:00 (CET) / 19:30 to 21:00 (JST)

Chair: Harald CONRAD (Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf)

Join us also online, via Webex:

<https://hhu.webex.com/hhu/j.php?MTID=m31da99dae8f0616919f9d7cd38458161>

Meeting-ID: 2792 494 2020

Kenncode: URtd8kppg36

Paper 9 **“Sharing Creativity: Japanese Art Projects and the Negotiation of Change in Sumida” (in person)**

Anna-Maria Stabentheiner (University of Vienna)

Paper 10 **“Resilience under Legal Precarity: Co-ethnic Businesses, Non-standard Employment and an Emerging Ethnic Enclave of Asylum Seekers from Türkiye” (in person)**

Büşra KUPLAY (University of Zurich)

Paper 11 **“To what extent do vocational qualifications in Japan provide young people with a 'second chance'?” (in person)**

Imogen BRIGGS (University of Melbourne)

Paper 12 **“Labor Shortages, Career Opportunities, and the Limits of Workplace Integration in Rural Japan” (online)**

Stefan AICHHOLZER (Hashimoto Foundation)



Abstracts

Session 1: "Migration, Education, and Unequal Life-Course Transitions in and beyond Japan"

Paper 1 "Negotiating Multilingualism: The Management of Language Diversity in Japan's Primary and Lower Secondary Schools" (in person)

Julian WOLLINGER (University of Vienna)

The steadily growing foreign population in various places all over Japan is resulting in higher numbers of children who are not native in Japanese. Even though they are not legally included in Japan's compulsory education, these children still have the right to free primary and lower secondary education in Japanese public schools. This raises the question how language support and management of language diversity are facilitated or opposed within Japan's educational institutions.

Whilst monolingual ideologies persist and continue to shape school-level policies, research has shown that social networks, local educational support, and language inclusivity within classrooms are essential for acculturation and academic achievement. School's language policies and practices are also reflected in the language use on signs within schools (schoolscape), where studies have shown that language support is not only instructional but also spatial, symbolic, and political, and that visible inclusion can sharply diverge from actual multilingual practice. This is not only the case in Japan but various countries worldwide. Especially in Japan, however, academic research has yet to focus on the impact schools have on multilingualism by analysing how language diversity is facilitated within spaces of education.

Against this backdrop, this project investigates the role of language in educational spaces in Japan by exploring the management of language diversity in schools. By combining ethnographic approaches with analyses of schoolscape and focus group interviews with teachers as well as semi-structured one-on-one interviews with parents, I aim to increase our understanding of how current diversification processes are negotiated within education contexts.

In this presentation I will give insights on my findings from my first round of fieldwork (July 2026) in three public schools in Kyōto and Ōizumi (Gunma), depicting the different ways in which schools can handle language diversity depending on available resources. Furthermore, I will show that practices of (language) support measures for foreign children vary deeply and are used as different means of integration and acculturation into school and Japanese society.

Paper 2 "How *Karihomen* Youths or Youths Who Have a *Karihomen* Family Member Decide Their Future Course after High School Graduation?" (in person)

Riko SHIBUYA (University of Tokyo)

Through the interview, this study reveals how Kurdish/Turkish *karihomen* youths or youths who have a *karihomen* family member decide their future course after high school graduation. *Karihomen* refers to a situation in which immigrants, although lacking legal status, are known to the Immigration Office and are required to go to the Immigration Office once every few months. While some studies on the experience of undocumented youths highlight the influential role of the legal status and argue that the legal status is "a master status" that surpasses other kinds of social attributes (Terriquez 2015), other studies highlight the intersection of the legal status and other kinds of social attributes (Enriquez 2017). This study adopts the latter as its analytical perspective. Aside from the influence of the legal status, Turkish/Kurdish youths are likely to be exposed to the norms inside the community, and xenophobia from Japanese society. Thus, this study focuses on the intersection of border control, and the norms inside the community and xenophobia.



Karihomen youths begin to notice that they have no legal status when they are high school students. This is because *karihomen* youths have some limitations when deciding their future course after high school graduation. They are rejected to enter some colleges or universities because of their legal status. They don't have choice to enter the workforce because the undocumented are prohibited from working. Under this condition, interviewees decide to go on to the university which has a record that *karihomen* student got the special permission to stay after enrolment, or choose colleges by considering the job they can easily get even if they return to their "home country." In addition, over the past few years, Japan has facilitated deportation and experienced growing xenophobia. Against this backdrop, some youths are exposed to the norm which prohibits children from living alone despite longing to stay in Japan even when their undocumented family members decide to go back to their home country. Other youths decide to go back to the home country after graduation due to the heightened discrimination in Japan although they successfully get legal status after long years of the undocumented condition.

The existing literature has focused on whether undocumented youths graduate from high school, or whether they receive higher education. This study aims to contribute to this literature, describing the diverse pathways *karihomen* youths or youths who have a *karihomen* family member choose and the background against the choice by focusing on the intersection of border control, and the norm of the community and xenophobia growing in Japan.

Paper 3 **"Community-Based Support Structures and Immigrant Second-Generation Career Formation: A Japan-South Korea Comparison" (in person)**

Gijung SONG (Nagoya University)

How do second-generation immigrants forge career trajectories that transcend both downward assimilation and ethnic enclosure in societies where institutionally complete ethnic communities are absent? This study addresses this question through a comparative analysis of two immigrant-concentrated areas: Homi Danchi in Toyota City, Japan (Brazilian community) and Tetgol Maeul in Ansan City, South Korea (Goryeoin community—ethnic Koreans from the former Soviet Union).

Existing theories of immigrant incorporation, most notably segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), have emphasized the role of institutionally complete ethnic communities in enabling second-generation upward mobility through selective acculturation. However, these frameworks were developed primarily in North American contexts and remain underexplored in East Asian societies, where institutional ethnic community infrastructure is often weak and state-society relations differ significantly from Western cases. Both cities share structural similarities as industrial cities with high concentrations of foreign residents, making them productive sites for systematic comparison. At the same time, they differ markedly in their civil society configurations and institutional support landscapes, providing analytical leverage for isolating the conditions under which community-based support structures operate.

Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork and life-story interviews conducted in Homi Danchi, this study demonstrates that community learning support classrooms function as key sites of community-based support—providing networks, role models, and educational resources that substitute for absent ethnic institutional infrastructure. Rather than producing assimilative or homeland-oriented trajectories, these structures foster what I term "local-transnational career pathways": locally embedded professional roles, such as medical interpretation, multicultural support work, and community coordination, that draw simultaneously on heritage and host-society cultural resources.

This study then turns to the comparative case of Ansan's Goryeoin enclave, where a structurally distinct support configuration is observed. As Lee (2016) has argued, South Korean civil society tends toward policy advocacy rather than grassroots community provision, in contrast to Japan's tradition of locally embedded civic organizations. In Ansan, support for Goryeoin residents is dominated by public institutions—including the Ansan Foreign Resident Support Center and the Goryeoin Cultural Center "Nomo"—rather than by civil society-driven,



community-embedded structures. Based on preliminary fieldwork and interviews with support organizations conducted in 2026, this study examines whether and how community-based support structures function within this contrasting institutional environment, and what implications this has for second-generation career formation among Goryeoin youth.

By comparing two cases in which second-generation immigrants navigate between heritage and host-society resources under different institutional conditions—grassroots civic support in Japan versus state-led infrastructure in South Korea—this study argues that the structural character of community-based support, not merely its presence or absence, shapes the pathways available to second-generation immigrants. This comparative framework contributes to debates on transnationalism, segmented assimilation, and immigrant integration in East Asia, while offering empirical grounding for multicultural policy in both countries.

This study, developed as a postdoctoral project extending the author's doctoral dissertation, presents findings from ongoing research supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS, Grant-in-Aid for Research Activity Start-up).

Paper 4 "Reworking the Life Course across Borders: Japanese and Chinese Young Adults in Singapore" (online)

Kexuan LI (National University of Singapore)

Transitions to adulthood in contemporary East Asia are increasingly prolonged, fragmented, and uncertain. In Japan, the postwar life-course model linking education, stable employment, marriage, and family formation has been progressively destabilized by labour-market restructuring, changing employment practices, and transformations in family formation. In China, marketization, educational expansion, intensifying employment competition, and changing family expectations have similarly produced more differentiated and uncertain pathways into adulthood. Yet these transformations have often been examined within national boundaries. Less attention has been paid to what happens when young adults move across borders during this already unsettled period of the life course.

This paper presents an ongoing doctoral project examining how transnational mobility reshapes transitions to adulthood among Japanese and Chinese young adults living in Singapore. It asks how different forms of mobility affect the timing, sequencing, and meanings of transitions involving education, employment, residential independence, intimate relationships, marriage, and future settlement. Rather than treating migration as a discrete geographical movement, the study approaches mobility as part of the life course itself: a process through which young adults negotiate career uncertainty, family obligations, institutional expectations, and alternative imagined futures.

The project adopts a qualitative comparative life-course approach and examines multiple mobility pathways, including postgraduate and academic mobility, company-sponsored expatriation, locally hired professional employment, education-to-work transitions, and temporary or exploratory forms of overseas mobility. Among Japanese participants, particular attention is paid to differences between company-sponsored expatriates and locally hired professionals, whose institutional positions structure career development, autonomy, return expectations, and family decisions in different ways. Among Chinese participants, educational mobility and subsequent entry into Singapore's labour market provide another pathway through which young adults negotiate the relationship between overseas mobility, professional development, family expectations, and longer-term settlement.

Singapore serves as a bounded comparative field in which Japanese and Chinese young adults encounter a shared destination society while bringing with them different institutional histories, employment cultures, family relations, gender expectations, and normative understandings of adulthood. The comparison therefore does not assume a homogeneous "East Asian" life course. Instead, it asks how similar experiences of mobility and uncertainty are interpreted and negotiated differently within distinct social and institutional configurations.



Conceptually, the paper brings mobility studies into dialogue with the life course approach. It considers transnational mobility as a site of life-course reconfiguration: moving abroad may accelerate some transitions, postpone or suspend others, and allow young adults to reorder previously expected trajectories. At the same time, such possibilities are unevenly shaped by migration regimes, organizational arrangements, labour-market positions, gender, class, and family resources. Through a comparison of Japanese and Chinese young adults in Singapore, the project seeks to illuminate both shared transformations and internal diversity in contemporary East Asian transitions to adulthood, while contributing to a more mobile and transnational understanding of the life course.

Session 2: “Gender, Voice, and Social Change in Contemporary Japan”

Paper 5 “The Flower Demo: new ways for speaking out” (in person)

Chiara FUSARI (University of Zurich)

The Flower Demo is a protest movement that started in 2019 following four not-guilty verdicts in sex crime cases, and it should be contextualised in the wave of #MeToo inspired movements. The first gathering was held on April 11, 2019, in Tokyo, but the movement quickly spread all over the country, becoming a recognisable site of anti-sexual violence activism. By March 2020 there was an active Flower Demo branch in every prefecture and as September 2026 there are still several active branches that meet on the 11 of every month.

The paper addresses the question of who are the people behind this movement and what pushed them to take action. Based on interviews with 18 organisers from 13 different Flower Demos collected between 2023 and 2024, it shows that most of the organisers had no previous experience getting involved in social movements. Many of them had developed a great interest in the issue of sexual violence because of personal experiences, some had themselves been victims of sexual assault, and some were professionals working closely with survivors. For several organisers the movement became an extension of their professional or political life, and it provided them an outlet to express anger and frustration that had been mounting for years.

The paper shows how the flexibility of the movement, its loose structure, and lack of rigid hierarchical relations lowered the hurdle for people to get involved despite their lack of experience. Moreover, to lessen the emotional as well as practical burden of organising a Flower Demo, organisers often formed local networks with other interested people, creating organising teams. In urban locations, often organisers prepared speeches and survivors took the microphone to share their stories with the audience. However, in several locations, especially more rural ones, the most common style of Flower Demo is holding a silent standing demonstration, with participants standing mostly in silence for half or one hour holding banners and signs.

I argue that the ability to adapt the protest repertoire to the organisers needs and skills as well as the local situations, contributed to make the movement more accessible also to people who had always kept their distance from social movements. Therefore, the paper asks important questions on the nature and future of social movements in Japan, on their potential contribution to social change, and on what it means for people to get involved in collective actions.

Paper 6 “Gendered Life Courses, Labor, and Knowledge in Contemporary Japanese Fortune-Telling” (in person)

Shoko KUROKAWA (University of Tokyo)

Fortune-telling has become increasingly popular in contemporary Japan. It has developed into a substantial industry, with a market size estimated at nearly 100 billion yen in 2023. Previous



studies have examined fortune-telling primarily as a form of magic or religious practice that persists or becomes reactivated in contemporary society. Much of this research has focused on the demand side; for example, how fortune-telling in magazines has provided female readers with knowledge for coping with anxieties in everyday life (Hashisako 2019). Gregory (2012), by contrast, examined professional tarot readers and the relationship between tarot and the demands of the neoliberal market. Through fieldwork in New York City, Gregory shows how tarot is “put to work” as a tool for personal adaptation to normalized conditions of precarity, including the reorganization of affect and the development of labour capacity. In Japan, women constitute the majority of fortune-telling service workers, while divination systems other than tarot are also widely practiced. This study therefore adopts Gregory’s perspective while incorporating gender as a central analytical perspective.

Based on participant observation at fortune-telling establishments and interviews with over 40 professional fortune-tellers, the findings are fourfold. First, numerous schools provide training and certification in divinatory knowledge and techniques, creating relatively accessible routes into the occupation that require neither specific educational backgrounds nor high tuition fees.

Second, interviews reveal several pathways into fortune-telling. Many professional fortune-tellers are women who have been marginalized in the labour market by gendered life courses, as well as people who entered non-regular employment due to the historical circumstances of their generation. Past experiences of hardship were also sometimes valued as qualities of a good counsellor and considered in the selection of fortune-tellers.

Third, in establishments where multiple professional fortune-tellers work, they are respectfully addressed as “sensei,” an honorific commonly used for teachers and doctors. Although fortune-telling is often socially regarded as suspicious, they are treated respectfully by workplaces and clients as knowledgeable counsellors. Such recognition, while also functioning as a form of managerial control, contributed to those fortune-tellers’ sense of fulfilment and their altruistic and dedicated approach to customer service.

Fourth, unlike the tarot examined by Gregory (2012), birth-date-based divination widely practiced in Japan provides frameworks for understanding individuals’ characteristics, and long-term destinies including relationships with families, approaches to work, and favourable or unfavourable periods. Several female professional fortune-tellers described taking up this form of divination through their caring roles, seeking knowledge about what might happen to themselves or their family members in the future and how to understand their characteristics. They came to see divination as a source of knowledge or answers.

Building on research on the affinity between divination and neoliberal precarity, this study examines the two interconnected frames of the relationship between gender and fortune-telling: the “outer frame,” in which fortune-tellers’ labour is shaped by gendered life courses and employment structures, and the “inner frame,” in which gendered caring experiences generate demand for particular forms of divinatory knowledge and connect to the labour of providing that knowledge.

Paper 7 " Exploring Life Satisfaction among Foreign Residents in Japan: A Quantitative Analysis through the Lens of Social Capital" (in person)

Tobias KLEINSCHMIDT (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Japan’s foreign resident population has more than doubled over the past two decades, reaching almost four million by mid-2025. Despite this growth, life satisfaction among foreign residents remains understudied. Existing studies often focus on narrowly defined groups and rarely examine life satisfaction through an explicit social capital framework. This study therefore examines the factors associated with life satisfaction among foreign residents in Japan and the role of different forms of social capital.

The analysis draws on the 2018 Survey of Foreign Citizens Regarding Life and Work (N = 1,122). Three hierarchical OLS regression models are estimated on a complete-case sample of 615 respondents. The models sequentially include socioeconomic, demographic,



household, and migration-related controls, nine indicators of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, and six indicators of affiliation, which is treated as a related but theoretically and analytically distinct concept from social capital.

The baseline model explained 12.0% of the variance in life satisfaction. Adding the social capital indicators increased the explained variance by 4.8 percentage points to 0.168, while the affiliation indicators added another 4.6 percentage points, bringing R^2 to 0.214. Both additions were statistically significant at the block level. In Model 2, close relationships with Japanese people and participation in co-national associations were positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas the other social capital indicators showed no comparable pattern. After affiliation was added, the coefficient for close relationships with Japanese people weakened and was no longer statistically significant in the OLS model, while co-national association participation remained positively associated. Municipal attachment was the only statistically significant affiliation indicator and showed the strongest association with life satisfaction among all social capital and affiliation indicators.

A comparison with Hommerich and Tiefenbach (2018) shows a similar pattern once affiliation is considered. In the present study, the coefficient for close relationships with Japanese people decreased from $B = 0.155$ to $B = 0.105$ after the affiliation indicators were introduced, a reduction of 32.3%. Hommerich and Tiefenbach report that 32.5% of the total effect of social capital on subjective well-being operated indirectly through social affiliation. Although these percentages are derived from different analytical approaches and are therefore not directly comparable, a similar tendency emerges despite differences in measurement and population. This does not establish that the same mechanism is involved in both studies, but suggests that the relationship between social capital, affiliation, and well-being may not be limited to one specific methodological approach or population.

The studies also differ in how affiliation is conceptualized and measured. Hommerich and Tiefenbach conceptualize affiliation mainly in relation to society as a whole, whereas municipal attachment shows the clearest affiliation association among the foreign residents examined here. Attachment to Japan and perceived recognition as a member of Japanese society were not significantly associated with life satisfaction in the full model. This contrast offers a point of comparison for examining how local forms of belonging and belonging to society as a whole relate to well-being among foreign residents in Japan.

Paper 8 "Tackling Climate Change without Climate Action? Shaping Transition through Neighbourhood Initiatives in Tokyo" (online)

Louise Hirao-Vermare (University of Ottawa)

It is recognised that addressing climate change effects requires that we transform our ways of living across society. Yet approaches to climate transition often rely on relatively fixed and technocratic understandings of both climate change and urban processes. Such approaches tend to privilege particular understandings of climate change and the forms of action considered relevant to its transition.

Japan provides a particularly relevant context because climate governance remains largely technocratic and state-led. At the same time, numerous locally embedded initiatives address everyday social, spatial, and environmental concerns without being organised explicitly around climate change. While research has examined forms of bottom-up climate action, less attention has been given to how initiatives that are not framed as climate-related may nevertheless relate to processes of climate transition. My research therefore asks how climate transition takes shape within neighbourhood-level practices in Tokyo.

Drawing on the Capitalocene, I understand climate change as shaped by historically specific capitalist relations through which labour and resources have been extracted, exploited and accumulated, rather than as the undifferentiated outcome of human activity. I draw from planetary urbanisation to understand neighbourhoods not as bounded local units, but as connected to wider urban processes. The multi-sited approach from urban political ecology allows me to anchor the analysis in situated practices and local forms of knowledge, while



tracing their relations with these wider processes. Finally, Lefebvre's spatial triad provides an analytical framework for examining practices, representations and lived experiences. The research draws on ethnographic fieldwork across three neighbourhood initiatives in Tokyo. It combines semi-guided interviews, walking interviews, participant observation and a participatory guestbook activity to examine how practices are enacted and how participants interpret and represent their engagement.

The research hypothesis is that climate transition may also emerge from forms of collective action that are not explicitly organised around climate objectives. Rather than assuming that climate related engagement only occurs where climate change is directly articulated, the project explores how concerns related to climate transition may be embedded within everyday practices, local forms of participation, and neighbourhood-based initiatives. A related hypothesis concerns the role of desirability. Indeed, climate change is often discussed through abstract targets, environmental risks, and policy measures, while everyday engagement may instead be organised around more immediate concerns. The research therefore examines whether and how participants themselves connect these local concerns to climate transition, and whether such connections are articulated, negotiated, or remain implicit. By November, the presentation will draw on the initial months of fieldwork to examine how these hypotheses are reflected in everyday practices across the three cases, and where connections to climate transition are articulated, negotiated or remain implicit.

Session 3: "Local Economies in Transition: Work, Enterprise, and Social Change in Japan"

Paper 9 "Sharing Creativity: Japanese Art Projects and the Negotiation of Change in Sumida" (in person)

Anna-Maria Stabentheiner (University of Vienna)

Starting in the 1990s, art projects have become a prominent feature of urban (re)development and community-building initiatives in Japan. Framed as participatory, socially engaged, and co-creative artistic practices, these projects are often site-specific and provide a platform for polarised discourses surrounding local issues – such as economic restructuring, demographic change, rising vacancy rates, eroding social ties, and disaster preparedness – as well as questions of local identity to come into contact.

In Kyōjima, a former light-industrial neighbourhood in Eastern Tokyo, art projects have been a steady presence ever since the late 1990s. Initially intended as an experimental response to the prevalent disaster risk and the neighbourhood's perceived decline, these artistic initiatives and the ways of life they imagine have since attracted a steady influx of young artists and creative professionals to the area. Over time, these creative individuals have formed their own communities that now play a role in shaping the neighbourhood's physical and social environment.

Against this backdrop, the Sumida Mukōjima EXPO, a local art project, provides a compelling case study to examine how these transformations are enacted, contested, and mediated in practice. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Kyōjima, I examine the Sumida Mukōjima EXPO as a relational arena in which divergent interpretations of urban identities, pasts, and futures are negotiated among heterogeneous groups, including residents, creative practitioners, municipal actors, and corporate stakeholders. To this end, I conceptualise art projects as relational "spaces of possibility" where opinions and lived realities can meet and, in turn, initiate alternative reimaginings of the neighbourhood, highlighting how sharing creativity can be a first step toward reshaping the city.



Paper 10 “Resilience under Legal Precarity: Co-ethnic Businesses, Non-standard Employment and an Emerging Ethnic Enclave of Asylum Seekers from Türkiye” (in person)

Büşra KUPLAY (University of Zurich)

This paper examines how Turkish nationals, predominantly Kurdish asylum seekers, in Japan navigate severe legal precarity and economic insecurity through an enclave economy. Drawing on four years of fieldwork and semi-structured interviews, it investigates how co-ethnic businesses and non-standard employment function as an adaptive resilience infrastructure under a restrictive asylum regime. Despite prolonged legal precarity, community members have established a distinctive occupational niche in the demolition sector as workers, business owners, and employers. Rather than viewing informal and non-standard employment solely as sites of exploitation, the paper argues that these arrangements constitute a form of collective resilience that sustains and reshapes labor-market access amid restrictive legal conditions and sudden legal crises, including heightened deportation risks following the 2023 revisions to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act. Ultimately, the case reveals a central structural tension between immigration controls and local economic dependence on foreign labor, addressing an empirical gap regarding the incorporation of asylum seekers in Japan's labor markets.

Paper 11 “To what extent do vocational qualifications in Japan provide young people with a 'second chance'?” (in person)

Imogen BRIGGS (University of Melbourne)

Vocational education and training (VET), besides its main role of producing skilled workers, is known to promote positive social benefits by connecting at-risk groups with skilled employment and further education. Currently, attention to VET in Japanese government policy centres around its ability to address worker shortages, particularly in the IT sector. While there have been attempts to address social problems like poverty and school refusal through reforms to formal education, vocational education has not received the same attention as a potential solution, and the effectiveness of VET in Japan for promoting social mobility is not well understood. As there is a sharp division between 'regular' and 'irregular' forms of employment, we can expect that the positive effects of VET in Japan are not as pronounced as in countries where VET and the university system are interlinked. To investigate the extent to which VET is fulfilling its potential role as an alternative pathway for young people to enter the workforce, I am conducting qualitative research for my doctoral thesis about young people's experience with vocational education. Student testimony so far identifies barriers such as the costs in the privatized adult education industry, as well as a lack of cross crediting or formalized qualification equivalencies. However, despite these barriers, vocational education still provides young people with stable pathways to full-time employment. The goal of this project is to inform more socially responsive approaches to education and employment policy, as well as to shed light on the unseen diversity in the Japanese workforce and contribute to discussions of alternatives to the two-track system.

Paper 12 “Labor Shortages, Career Opportunities, and the Limits of Workplace Integration in Rural Japan” (online)

Stefan AICHHOLZER (Hashimoto Foundation)

Japan's declining fertility rate and limited immigration have intensified labor shortages, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas. These firms often face difficulties attracting younger Japanese workers to physically demanding and/or relatively low-paid occupations, while their rural locations can further limit their recruitment pool. Increasingly, companies have turned to immigrant workers to address these shortages. Yet, retaining those



workers and providing them with opportunities for professional development and advancement raises questions about how far their incorporation into the Japanese workplace actually extends.

This ongoing qualitative study examines how small and medium-sized companies in Okayama Prefecture recruit, employ, support, and seek to retain immigrant workers. Drawing on interviews with company presidents and personnel responsible for recruitment, as well as foreign employees, the study investigates how firms determine wages and wage increases, how they assess performance, what opportunities they provide for career development and promotion, and how immigration status, language proficiency, and workplace practices affect these processes. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between perceived formal equality and actual equality outcomes. While employers often emphasize that immigrant workers are subject to the same evaluation standards and pay structures as Japanese employees, equal treatment in formal rules does not necessarily produce equal career outcomes. Early findings suggest that wage equality is frequently conceived as an organizational principle, but that differences can emerge over time through unequal access to skill development and positions involving greater responsibility. Japanese-language proficiency is often considered crucial not only for everyday communication but also for advancement, yet opportunities for formal language education are limited.

This study approaches immigrant employment not simply as a response to labor shortages, but as an evolving process of workplace incorporation. It highlights the tension between companies' growing dependence on immigrants and the institutional and organizational structures that continue to position many of them as temporary workers. By examining both employer practices and immigrant workers' experiences, the study asks under what conditions recruitment can develop into longer-term employment, career development, and meaningful workplace integration.



Stadt- und Regionalforschung / Urban and Regional Studies

09:30 Uhr bis 13:00 Uhr / 09:30 a.m. to 13:00 a.m. (CET) / 17:30 to 21:30 (JST)

Organizer: Cornelia Reiher, Freie Universität Berlin

Meeting link: <https://fu-berlin.webex.com/fu-berlin/j.php?MTID=mf3badec9f6da47c9017c7905db5905a6>

Meeting code: 2784 460 4255

Meeting password: w7nMdhNHk92

Program

9:30-11:00

The discourse of “Local Vitalization” within the government-organized urban to rural migration in Japan

Yuki Negi, Tokyo University (online)

Re-examining regional revitalization: Exploring local autonomy based on the ethics of care and the idea of the commons

Kiyomi Misaki, Hokkaido University (online)

Vacant Houses and the Transformation of Rural Japan: A Field-based Study from Kochi Prefecture

Julia Olsson, Lund University (online)

From Rural Region to Tropical Tourism Destination: Tourism and the Changing Image of Itoshima, Japan

Nagatomo, Jun, Kwansei Gakuin University

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 -13:00

Care in Motion: Value and Commodification in the Transnational Reptile Trade

Sarah Clay, Freie Universität Berlin (online)

Civil society engagement among young adults in Japanese regional cities. A resilience strategy against socio-economic decline?

Jonas John, University of Vienna

Creating Space for Belonging: Urban Safe Spaces and Social Participation for People Affected by muen shakai in Contemporary Japan

Denise Westphal, Freie Universität Berlin

The social organisational aspects of traditional craft industries in contemporary Japan: through the lens of the division of labour

Shilla Lee, HHU Düsseldorf



Abstracts

The discourse of “Local Vitalization” within the government-organized urban to rural migration in Japan

Yuki Negi, *Tokyo University*

With globalization and diversification of immigration and migration patterns, migration studies in the West have shifted their focus from traditional “collective” movements such as labor migration to “individual” migration driven by factors other than political and economic ones (e.g., lifestyle migration, counter-urbanization). Migration from urban to rural areas (urban to rural migration) has also been considered one of these “individual” migration in the West.

Meanwhile, in Japan, rural societies have suffered from serious depopulation and an aging population. Therefore, the national government has promoted the urban to rural migration of younger urban residents by many national policies. One example is “Local Vitalization Corps (Chiiki Okoshi Kyōryokutai)”. Under this program, the government provides subsidies to rural municipalities and to young people living in urban areas to enable them to live in rural areas for a certain period and engage in “Local Vitalization (Chiiki Okoshi)” activities. Under this program, more than 8000 young people migrated to rural areas across Japan in the last year, and “government-organized” rural-urban migration is spreading.

This presentation examines the discourse and practices of “Local Vitalization” that underpin this migration program. The discourse of “Local Vitalization” includes moral and contributive aspects: it serves as a grassroots discourse through which migrants give meaning to their daily practices, while simultaneously becoming a political discourse through which the national and local government justify this program as a policy of “consideration” for depopulated rural areas. What happens when the government and migrants develop the practices of the “Local Vitalization” through this program in small rural areas? This presentation analyzes this question through my fieldwork in Ama town, a small island municipality in Shimane prefecture, West Japan, which hosts the largest number of Local Vitalization Corps in Japan in the recent years.

Yuki Negi is a PhD student in social anthropology in University of Tokyo and a researcher in Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Yuki specializes mainly in the rural revitalization and community development in rural areas in Japan, especially small islands. Yuki did his fieldwork in Ama town, Shimane prefecture in West Japan and worked at Town office, Commerce and industry association and semipublic sector as a member of Local Vitalization Cooperators (Chiiki Okoshi Kyōryokutai) for about two years. His interest is participation in community development, interaction between the outsiders and local residents and the political discourse and practices about rural revitalization. He is also participating in some interdisciplinary and international research projects which include the agricultural revitalization project in Oshima Island in Tokyo and Kauai Island in Hawaii. He is researching the interaction between the migrants and the islanders in the local agriculture in these projects.

Re-examining regional revitalisation: Exploring local autonomy based on the ethics of care and the idea of the commons

Kiyomi Misaki, *Hokkaido University*

This project explores the idea of the commons, encompassing the ethics of care, to re-examine regional revitalisation amid patriarchal and neoliberal tendencies, using the commons



initiatives in Suginami Ward, Tokyo, as an example. “We need a young man who is free to use for revitalisation of the town centre”. When I asked a leader of the town’s revitalisation project if I could participate in it, that was the answer I received. This connotes the current regional revitalisation co-opted by patriarchal and neoliberal tendencies. Recent regional policies aim to build vibrant and sustainable communities by directing people to regional areas, revitalising local economies, and supporting local people’s livelihoods through subsidies. They also emphasise targeted support for pressing global and social issues, such as zerocarbon initiatives in local municipalities and the active participation of youth and women in local activities. Under the guise of local autonomy, local municipalities are working to retain women and young people and remain vibrant. Although these policies are based on competition for subsidies among local municipalities, they encourage people to engage with local municipalities and communities, not merely to build facilities promoted decades ago. However, if revitalisation efforts limit participation to those compatible with current political and economic systems, one must consider revitalisation through the lens of liberty, equity, and justice by listening to voices left behind by existing revitalisation frameworks. The ethics of care urges us to reimagine political and economic systems framed in patriarchy. Similarly, the idea of the commons challenges neoliberal doctrine through social practices of mutual aid that care for shared values and resources. Local networks upholding “Revitalising the commons through local autonomy”, including Suginami Ward, will offer insight into an alternative interpretation of revitalisation beyond urban-rural boundaries, with the positive side of regional policies.

Kiyomi Misaki obtained her PhD from Asia Institute, Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne. She is a visiting researcher at the Center for Advanced Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University. Her research interests include democratic ideas, institutions, and practices for sustainable community development and local autonomy. Her current research explores alternative political and economic systems that ensure everyone’s participation in political, economic, and social spheres.

Vacant Houses and the Transformation of Rural Japan: A Field-based Study from Kochi Prefecture

Julia Olsson, *Lund University*

Japan’s shrinking and aging population has produced profound demographic and spatial inequalities, with rural and peripheral areas particularly affected. One visible consequence is the growing number of vacant and deteriorating houses. In 2023, 13.8% of Japan’s housing stock was vacant, while Kochi Prefecture recorded one of the country’s highest rates at 20.1%. Yet vacancy cannot be understood simply as a consequence of declining demand. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation in Kochi Prefecture, this paper examines how bureaucratic, emotional, and cultural factors shape the possibilities for addressing vacant houses in rural Japan.

Current policy initiatives largely seek to attract in-migrants and have generated considerable interest among potential newcomers. However, local actors frequently struggle to provide suitable housing, revealing an important gap between demand and the availability of vacant properties. At the same time, residents express ambivalent attitudes toward in-migration. While many recognize the need to address vacant houses and population decline, there is also hesitation toward newcomers without prior connections to the area. Interviews further reveal



sentiments ranging from frustration and resignation to an acceptance of demographic decline as an inevitable reality.

Rather than framing vacant houses solely as an economic or housing-market problem, this paper conceptualizes vacancy as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by local attachments, institutional constraints, and competing visions of rural futures. The prefectural government itself increasingly emphasizes mitigating rather than “solving” vacancy, seeking to keep the problem at a manageable level. The paper argues that understanding rural vacancy requires attention not only to demographic decline and in-migration, but also to the social relations and meanings attached to houses and place. While the paper is situated in the specific context of rural Japan, its findings offer broader insights into the challenges of housing vacancy, demographic decline, and rural transformation in other contexts.

Julia Olsson is a third-year PhD student at Lund University, Sweden, and is currently a visiting researcher at Tohoku University through the JF-CIJS-EAJS Fellowship Programme. Her research examines the lived experiences and everyday practices of rural depopulation, with a particular focus on vacant houses and the physical and social consequences of demographic decline. Her work explores how individuals and communities experience, respond to, and make sense of the ongoing transformation of rural areas in Japan.

From Rural Region to Tropical Tourism Destination: Tourism and the Changing Image of Itoshima, Japan

Nagatomo, Jun, *Kwansei Gakuin University*

Itoshima City, located west of the Fukuoka metropolitan area, has changed considerably as a tourism destination since the 2000s. Once characterised mainly by agriculture and fishing, the region gradually became known as a destination for day trips from Fukuoka. This presentation looks at the development of tourism in Itoshima and the changes in how the region has been represented as a tourism destination.

The initial development of tourism was closely connected to food, particularly the region's oyster-farming industry. From the early 2010s, oyster huts and related food tourism helped attract visitors from the Fukuoka metropolitan area. Around the same period, local magazines began introducing cafes along the coastline, often presenting them through images associated with tropical landscapes. These images helped create a different image of the region from its earlier representation as a rural and agricultural area.

From the mid-2010s, images of coastal cafes, beaches and palm trees increasingly appeared in travel magazines across Japan, and later spread through social media. Their repeated circulation helped establish a recognisable image of Itoshima as a tropical seaside leisure destination. The process involved not only tourism businesses and other producers of tourism-related content, but also visitors and social media audiences, who played a role in selecting, reproducing and circulating particular images of the region.

The development of Itoshima's tourism image thus involved the interaction of local producers, visitors and media audiences. The changing image was not simply a result of tourism development; it also contributed to redefining Itoshima as a tourism destination. This case provides an opportunity to reconsider how tourism images are formed and circulated beyond the conventional distinction between tourism producers and tourists.

Jun Nagatomo is a Professor at the School of International Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan. He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Queensland. His



research focuses on migration, particularly Japanese migration to Australia, lifestyle-oriented migration in Japan, and tourism and culture. His major publications include *Migration as Transnational Leisure: The Japanese Lifestyle Migrants in Australia* (Brill), *Australia no Nihonjin: Kako soshite Genzai* (Japanese Migrants in Australia: Past and Present) (Horitsubunkasha), "De-territorialized Ethnic Community: The Residential Choices and Networks among Japanese Lifestyle Migrants in South-East Queensland, Australia" *Japanese Studies* 31(3) :423-440.

Care in Motion: Value and Commodification in the Transnational Reptile Trade

Sarah J. Clay, *Freie Universität Berlin*

Over the past decade, Japan has experienced a boom in reptile keeping. Breeding comparatively few of the animals it consumes, Japan has become a major importer of living reptiles, with annual imports rising from around 192,000 in 2016 to more than 337,000 in 2022. Japanese reptile owners are concentrated in urban areas and have increasingly pivoted from wild-caught animals toward so-called designer morphs; captive-bred variants with unusual colors or patterns which are particularly "collectible" (korekushon-sei). Europe specializes in morph breeding. Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic together accounted for roughly 25% of the value of reptiles imported into Japan in 2023. With the increase of exotic reptiles in Japan, an emergent issue is that when owners lose the ability or willingness to care for them, animals are sometimes released into natural environments where they threaten local ecosystems as invasive species. In response, a growing number of sanctuaries in Japan take in these "unfortunate animals" (fukō na dōbutsu) and shelter them for life.

As work in progress, this paper presents a project plan to follow the commodity chain of live reptiles "in reverse," from a sanctuary on the remote Miyako-jima, through Japanese apartments and pet cafés, to European reptile fairs and breeding facilities, and toward the regions from which genetic lineages originate. Using multi-sited and hybrid ethnographic methods, I ask how practices of care and processes of value production shape one another as animals move between places and change commodity registers. I propose the concept of the "commodity spiral" to incorporate reproduction into the commodity chain. In this industry, reptiles do not simply move along chains but reproduce within them, generating novelty that reshapes scarcity and value, and in doing so gradually eroding the scarcity on which their value depends. In so doing, this project speaks to current debates in the environmental humanities and STS on the commodification of nonhuman life and the entanglements of capital and care.

Sarah J. Clay is situated at the crossroads of environmental anthropology and political ecology, and her work explores how more-than-human relationships of care become entangled with broader power dynamics. Sarah received her PhD in Japanese Studies from Freie Universität Berlin in 2026, and holds an MA and BA in Japanese Studies from Ghent University and a BA in Fine Arts from ArtEZ Academy of Art and Design. Based on hybrid ethnographic fieldwork in the Miyako Islands, her doctoral research examined how urban-to-rural migrants' practices of care for animals, plants, and the ocean reproduce and renegotiate historical asymmetries between Okinawa and mainland Japan. Pushing her interest in more-than-human mobilities further, Sarah is currently developing a postdoctoral project on the transnational trade in live reptiles between Europe and Japan that examines how practices of care and processes of commodification shape one another through animal movements.

**Civil society engagement among young adults in Japanese regional cities. A resilience strategy against socio-economic decline?**

Jonas John, *University of Vienna*

Like other industrialised states, Japan has experienced a socio-economic change since the 1990s, which has rather ambivalent or even negative effects. Semi-agglomerative regions are affected by this, as young adults migrate away, leading to business exodus, economic decline and high social expenditure. Consequently, the state has responded by strengthening controlled governance, involving non-state actors increasingly in urban planning (*machizukuri*), shifting more responsibility to citizens within limited parameters. Since 2014, the state has focused on establishing regional core cities as attractive barriers against migration to agglomerations.

One such regional city-region is Tsu in Mie Prefecture. Mie is a key national supplier of semiconductor components. The prefectural capital, with a population of ~266,000, serves as a hub between the Chūbu and Kinki regions, with good connections to the major centres of Nagoya and Osaka, and is an important trading port. However, the population has been declining rapidly since 2008 due to youth out-migration and a low birth rate. To enhance the city's attractiveness and retain young adults, the local administration and the civic community have initiated two endogenous regional revitalisation projects: an "area platform" centred on the former commercial centre and a *machizukuri*-council for the area around the central station. Here, one measure is to actively involve young adults in governance processes in these projects. Against this backdrop, the paper investigates whether and why young adults engage within or outside these projects. Methodologically, the research project adopts a qualitative approach: document analysis, theory-guided interviews and participant observation are used to explore measures, motivations and challenges. Applying Stone's Urban-Regime Analysis (1989, 2015), it analyses how regional resources are identified, reinterpreted as potential for innovative solutions and decided as future development goals by participatory formats within the frame of regional endogenous governance. However, the question remains how the region becomes a projection of belonging and a reason for commitment.

Jonas John studied Japanese Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin (M.A. in Japanese Studies) from 2018-2025. He was employed as a research associate at the Institute for Social Innovation in Berlin from 2024 to 2026. Since August 2026, he is working as a research associate at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna via the university's SSH program. His research focuses on political participation among young adults, governance processes, and political representation in Japan and Germany.

Creating Space for Belonging: Urban Safe Spaces and Social Participation for People Affected by *muen shakai* in Contemporary Japan

Denise Westphal, *Freie Universität Berlin*

For my Master's thesis, I plan a stay abroad in Tokyo to investigate how urban spaces can enable social participation and create opportunities for belonging for people affected by *muen shakai*, a social condition characterized by the weakening or absence of conventional social connections. When relationships break down, new connections do not arise of their own accord. In Tokyo in particular, one of the world's most densely populated metropolitan areas, physical proximity does not necessarily translate to social connectedness. Rather, spaces that facilitate encounters, belonging, and the formation of new relationships may need to be deliberately



created and maintained. I want to focus on spaces that are explicitly conceptualized by their providers as *ibasho* or “safe spaces”. While *ibasho* can broadly refer to a place where one feels comfortable, accepted, or has a sense of belonging, the notion of the “safe space” foregrounds questions of accessibility, social interaction, and opportunities for creating new social relationships in this context. The paper asks how such spaces are created within Tokyo, what forms of participation they enable, and how the actors who establish them define what makes a space “safe” or conducive to belonging. The analysis will consider range of actors involved in creating and maintaining these spaces, including Buddhist temples, civil society organizations, as well as local and governmental institutions. I am also interested in examining whether the state itself provides such spaces, or primarily creates the institutional and financial conditions that enable civil society actors to establish them. Based on qualitative case studies in Tokyo, I plan to combine participant observation with qualitative interviews.

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The social organisational aspects of traditional craft industries in contemporary Japan: through the lens of the division of labour

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A recurring theme in studies of Japanese society is demographic shrinkage. This topic has been explored in a wide range of fields, including the study of the craft industry. Although the prevailing strategies for revitalising the local craft industry in Japan emphasise market expansion and increasing the number of practitioners, this paper argues that reshaping and reinventing existing social relations to adapt to a changing environment is equally important as analysing economic and demographic data. Identifying the conditions that enable craftspeople to sustain their craft as a livelihood, and ultimately the local industry requires an understanding of the shifting social relations. Focusing on changes to the division of labour at the Echizen lacquerware production site in Sabae, Fukui Prefecture, this paper explores how a local craft industry can be maintained amid shrinking yet evolving local social dynamics.

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