

Panels, Presenters and Titles for the 2024 AJJ annual meeting

SESSION 1: SATURDAY, 13:00 to 14:30

Panel 1: (Room 8) Margins A

Chair: **Tom Gill**, Meiji Gakuin University

Paper 1: *Localization of Management and Corporate Culture in Japanese Transplants in the United States – The Role of “Key Managers” as Cultural Brokers in Creating a “Third-Culture” Plant*

Atsushi Sumi, Associate Professor, Meiji University

This study explores the localization of management practices in Japanese-owned firms in the United States. Drawing on interviews with Japanese managers and locally hired American managers and workers in Japanese transplants in the southeastern United States (Virginia and North Carolina), as well as Japanese managers at corporate headquarters in Japan, this research focuses on the recruitment and retention of locally hired American employees.

My primary concern is how these transplant companies navigate and blend Japanese corporate culture – including practices like long-term job tenure, consensus decision making, punctuality, and a work-centered lifestyle – with American corporate values, such as career mobility, short-term time orientation, and the separation of work and family life. This merging of cultural elements gives rise to a unique "third-culture" plant that reflects a synthesis of both Japanese and American practices.

The study argues that enhancing the retention of locally hired American employees is crucial for Japanese-owned firms in the U.S. In particular, “key managers” with long tenures play an essential role as cultural brokers, mitigating cultural differences and fostering integration between American and Japanese employees. Their efforts contribute significantly to creating a cohesive third-culture environment within these transplants.

Paper 2: *Towards an Intersectional Anthropology: From the Queer and Mix Community*

Ubu Araki, PhD Candidate Seijō University

The presenter is conducting fieldwork in queer communities (communities of sexual minorities) and Mix communities (communities of racial and ethnic minorities with multiple roots) and their intersections in Japan.

I think that it is necessary to understand the care, communication, political activism practices, and artistic activities of social and cultural minority communities as "folk" that indeed exist in Japan today, and to read them as Japanese folk and cultural history. This is because the people who gather in these communities are also the members of society, common people, who are responsible for the culture and history of Japan.

In queer and Mix communities, I experienced a collaboration of research and artistic activism and political activism. I have also gained some perspective on the history of research from the perspective of minority culture and history.

In this presentation, I will discuss the need for an "intersectionality" perspective in order for Japanese anthropology to recognize social minorities as "us" rather than as others, and to read the culture and history of minority communities as one of the Japanese folklore that certainly exists, rather than trivializing it.

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Paper 3: *Reshaping the hikikomori mythos: How conversing emic and etic knowledge can clarify and expand our understanding of the impact of Japanese socio-cultural values on the hikikomori issue*

Filipe Varela Franco, PhD Candidate, Kanazawa University

In Japan, the *hikikomori* issue has long been argued to be a possible unforeseen consequence of long-standing socio-cultural values, which are at the root of ostracizing behaviors towards those who are unwilling or incapable of conforming to them. Despite the debate on the influence of said values, tackled mainly from an etic perspective, rarely do we consider the *hikikomori* emic perspective as the central point of analysis, since obtaining this knowledge can prove challenging, given *hikikomori*'s social seclusion and, often, unwillingness to make their condition known. Drawing on the thematic analysis of 45 articles from the *hikikomori*-produced magazine, titled *Hikipos* (Franco, 2024), I seek to demonstrate how *hikikomori* emic perspectives can corroborate and expand etic knowledge, namely on two aspects. First, on how Saito's *hikikomori* system (Saito, 2013) can be expanded to explain the correlation of psycho-social conditions that lead to *hikikomori*'s desire for isolation, as well as their growing resistance to abandon it. Second, how *hikikomori* narratives offer an outside perspective into Japanese society, revealing how culturally ingrained values of loyalty, conformity and harmony negatively impact their condition, and how they are able to cope with these values. I propose that by connecting *hikikomori*-produced narratives with existing etic knowledge of the issue, it is possible to reshape and clarify our understanding of its causes, while gaining an outsider look into Japanese society, to better understand the factors that prompt social withdrawal.

Panel 2: Collaboration's Limits?: Ethnographic Dialogue and the Reproduction of Social Boundaries and Categories (Room 9)

Chair: **Sachiko Horiguchi**, Temple University Japan

Panel abstract This panel approaches the question of dialogue and collaboration from the vantage of numerous projects that observe the contestation, negotiation, and reproduction of age, ethnic, gendered, and religious boundaries and groups. Our panel considers how the discourse and ideas of interlocutors, when 'taken seriously,' can sometimes undermine an ethical impulse to challenge hegemony and to cut through ideology. Collectively, the papers of this panel ask: how and when might collaboration and dialogue thwart apprehension of the cultural conditions and forces that enable the fieldwork encounter? And, when might relying on categories and understandings from our interlocutors not simply mask, but even reproduce, hegemonic and hierarchical social formations within Japanese society?

This panel draws on perspectives from anthropology in and beyond Japan that simultaneously forward the ethical imperative of collaboration and dialogue, while robustly questioning what the reflexive turn concerned itself with: the impact and afterlives of ethnography as both practice and text. As Handler argues in his study of Quebecois nationalism, dialogue between ethnographers and their interlocutors can undercut a critical approach when interlocutors common-sense and ethnographers' conceptual tools parallel one another. Similarly, the papers in this panel address how an uncritical relation to interlocutors' discourse can reify existing social boundaries (such as 'the Japanese') rather than chart their ongoing, processual constitution. Moving between questions of age, consumption, ethnicity, gender, and religion, these papers consider how to ethically engage an increasingly diverse Japan, whilst tracking cultural, economic, and material flows that necessitate an ethnographic approach which dispenses with rigid group boundaries.

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Paper 1: “*Sex Wars*” with Reference to the Recent Adult Video Law Reformation in Japan
Maiko Kodaka, Assistant Professor, Waseda University

In Japan, the *AV Shutsuen Higai Boushi Kyūsai Hō* (Prevention and Relief from Damage Caused by AV Appearance) was enacted in 2022, marking a significant effort to safeguard human rights, particularly those of porn actresses. This law emerged in the broader context of the #MeToo movement, where feminism has grown into a global conversation. However, the law’s introduction has sparked a contentious feminist debate. Organizations advocating for stronger consent laws highlight the Swedish model, which emphasizes that consent must be a clear, affirmative “yes”. On one hand, some feminist groups argue that the law effectively legitimizes pornography in Japan, interpreting it as commodifying women’s bodies and linking it to sexual violence. On the other hand, sex worker advocates worry that the law frames porn actresses as inevitable victims, denying them agency and ignoring their rights as workers.

One of the central issues is the lack of input from the adult entertainment industry during the drafting of the law. This has resulted in a legal landscape that mirrors the divisive “Sex Wars” debates of the 1980s, where anti-pornography feminists clashed with those advocating for sexual empowerment through pornography. The law has been criticized for unintended consequences, such as financial strain on production companies and the potential rise of illegal activities like private, exploitative shootings. In this paper, I aim to demonstrate how international feminist collaboration can enrich discussions on gender and sexuality while ensuring the importance of cultural sensitivity when applying feminist frameworks across different contexts.

Paper 2: *When Concepts Fail: The Pitfalls and Politics of Finding of Antisemitism in Japan*
Dylan O’Brien, PhD candidate, University of California at San Diego

The politics of applying the concept ‘antisemitism’ to speech and writing in Japan have been historically fraught. In my ethnographic fieldwork, local Jewish activists have pointed to 1995 as an example of antisemitism’s manifestation, when Bungei Shunjū published an article denying the Holocaust. However, it wasn’t easy for Jewish activists to convince the Japanese press that the incident was part of a larger wave of antisemitism. Some Japanese coverage of the issue asked whether it was even possible for Japanese people to be antisemitic.

More recently, press releases from the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center (2024) and other overseas organizations have labeled certain criticism in Japan of Israel post-October 7, 2023 as antisemitic. Some of the same Jewish activists active in 1995 as well as younger members of Tokyo’s Jewish communities point to this statements as evidence that “things have changed,” and in one interlocutor’s words, it was “naïve” and “blissful” thinking to say antisemitism was “not in” Japan. Yet, few Japanese commentators and outlets have even carried or responded to these press releases. With ethnographic moments like this in mind, I ask: what motivates different actors in Japan to assert causal linkages between what is written about Jews in Japan with other places and times – and what does this accomplish?

I argue that the perception of certain speech and writing in Japan as (dis)similar to antisemitism elsewhere is a discursive achievement, rather than an implicit folk perception or recognition of some ontological essence (un)common to the phenomena being compared. Through my fieldwork with Jewish organizations confronting Japanese representations of Jews, I detail how the recognition (or denial) of certain speech in Japan as antisemitic indexes ethnographically locatable labor. Looking to the larger significance of these findings, I forward that the likeness and uniqueness Japan bears to other contexts, rather than a perduring cultural core, is shaped by trackable linguistic labor that ethnography can follow with multi-sited fieldwork.

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Paper 3: *Between Admiration and Skepticism: How Japanese Parents View the Imaginary Figure of the White Western Father*

Evan Koike, Assistant Professor, University of Tokyo

Ideas about fatherhood are changing in contemporary Japan, raising questions about how men can best contribute to their families' wellbeing. Seeking guidance and unwilling to locate a role model in their own emotionally distant fathers, some men look to examples outside of Japan for inspiration and insights. In this paper, I analyze how parents in the Greater Tokyo Area grapple with what I call the *white western father*, an abstracted, racialized, and essentialized construct of how fatherhood is performed in Euro-American societies. While the white western father supposedly exemplifies a modern and universal standard of fatherhood, he is not uncritically accepted by those who assert his significance as a model. Teasing out these seeming paradoxes, I argue that the white western father serves as a heuristic device that both reifies and plays with ideas about parenting and Japaneseness.

Paper 4: *Community of Images: "Cover"-age and the Production of a Punk Magazine*

Robert M. Dahlberg-Sears, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University

The bi-monthly magazine *Punk Rock Issue Bollocks* is one of the representative publications for punk rock music and culture in Japan. It offers commentary on new music releases, interviews with performers, and punk cultural reflections – all co-produced by members of the punk scene. Every issue focuses on a featured performer with accompanying photograph on the front cover. As the cover of a magazine serves to entice readers to peruse, who appears on it re-presents the magazine and what it seeks to do. Especially within punk, a musical style with a broad sonic mandate, low bar to entry (famously “here are three chords, now form a band”), and supposed links to youthful rebellion, whose image comes to be synonymous with the magazine? Who is held up as representative of “punk”?

In this presentation I offer a case study on the limits of a community generated news source's ability to represent itself. Surveying the covers of the 14-year, 75+ issue run of *Bollocks*, I demonstrate a preference for particular intersections of gender, age, and musical style in the presentation of its community “scene.” Comparing these points with field observations, I then offer an assessment of how definite these characteristics can be. What does this co-production include or omit from its purview of the community? In so imagining, what futures does it allow for?

Panel 3: Folk culture (Room 10)

Chair: **Kaeko Chiba**, Akita International University

Paper 1: *Digital Archives Collaboration with different academic approaches and students ---significance of looking at culture from the multiple perspectives*

Kaeko Chiba, Professor, Akita International University

Located in northeastern Japan, Akita has the lowest birth rate and aging population in the country. The problem of low income is becoming more pronounced than in other prefectures. In recent years, it has become clear that not only in Akita, but also in rural Japan, folk culture is in danger of disappearing. In recent years, there have been some efforts to emphasize digital archives and to preserve disappearing cultures. In order to pass on these disappearing cultures, high-speed and mass digitization of two-dimensional materials such as paintings and documents, advanced three-dimensional digitization, and hereditary database analysis have been carried out in Japan and abroad. On the other hand, these archives tend to pay attention to Japanese high culture, including Noh, Kabuki, and Ukiyo paintings. Less attention has been paid to the digitization of folk culture, which we sometimes take for granted. Anthologists have discussed respecting the voices of informants and not erasing them in descriptions. However, my previous research (Inbound Business and Akita Digital Archives) has shown that there are few studies in folklore

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research that have empirically addressed how rural folk culture should be digitally archived. Furthermore, although there are discussions on how to focus on informants' voices in anthropology (Chiba 2010, Bubandt and Wentzer 2022), how to focus on voices in digital archives has not been clearly discussed in sustainable digital archive models (Potts 2022 Akama 2023). This research aims to analyze innovative digital archive methods focusing on folk culture in the rural community: 1) examine the current existing archive model by emphasizing direct voices, collaboration with students and interdisciplinary approach; 2) implement the constructed model, and re-analyzing the model; 3) share the digital archive model for folk culture, the Akita Folk Culture Digital Archive with local groups, propose a sustainable digital archive system, and improve the local education environment as a whole. My research shares the significance and challenges of collaboration with other disciplines, local community and students.

Paper 2: *Improvisation in Oki Folk Music and the Changing Local Community*

Yu Sasaki, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation focuses on the relationship between the improvisational nature of folk music and the local community in the case of Oki Island, Japan. Recent anthropological studies on folk music discuss the influence of ambiguous materiality to improvisation. However, these studies deal with music practice only within the community of participants. Contrarily, folklore studies have depicted the specific character of folk music as “ubiquitous throughout society with gradation”. From this perspective, this presentation aims to reconsider the concept of community assumed to share a habitus.

In the presenter's research, the loss of improvisational nature of folk music was observed, once influenced by ambiguity of materials such as cooking utensils used in songs and dances. With the decline in the village population, opportunities for banquets with folk music have decreased. The appeal of folk music has also declined with the emergence of other music genres. Local governments have organized theater performances and competitions of folk music as a traditional performing art. In this situation, folk music enthusiasts from outside have replaced participants from Oki Island. The transmission of music skills changed from unconscious memorization to conscious learning of authentic practices from published scores and videos of masters.

Oki folk music, which had once permeated the local society with improvisation, was transformed into a traditional performing art with authentic practices. Following this, a community of practitioners sharing authentic practices emerged, replacing the spontaneous coexistence of villagers in everyday interactions.

Paper 3: *The Exchange of Omamori During New Year's Visits to a Shrine in Sendai*

Shu Zhang MA candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation focuses on the interaction between “objects” and people, specifically examining the exchange of *omamori* during New Year's visits to a Shrine in Sendai. Through participant observation of the *omamori* exchange process as a New Year's *Miko* (shrine maiden), I analyze the behaviors of both the Shinto priests and the individuals who own *omamori* to explore the meanings they attribute to these objects. In this study, *omamori* is a type of amulet distributed by the shrine, believed to bring specific benefits, with a consecrated tablet wrapped in cloth or paper inside.

The participant observation revealed that Shinto priests (including *Negi* and *Miko*) and *omamori* owners attribute different meanings to *omamori*. The Shinto priests regard *omamori* as sacred, viewing them as extensions of the deity. In contrast, *omamori* owners often do not ascribe strong religious significance to them; instead, they view *omamori* as objects that can bring worldly benefits. Furthermore, it was found that unpredictability and uncontrollability are key aspects of *omamori*, giving them power as objects. *Omamori* also facilitate interactions between people, acting as social agents that influence and guide their practices.

Future research will need to delve deeper into the reasons why Shinto priests and *omamori* owners perceive *omamori* differently.

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SESSION 2: SATURDAY, 15:00 to 16:30

Panel 4: Margins B (Room 8)

Chair: **Greg Poole**, Dōshisha University

Paper 1: *Care for the urban underclass in neoliberal Japan: medical activism in the periphery of Tokyo*

Marina Mori, PhD candidate, Kyoto University

How has neoliberalism reshaped the regimes of care for the urban underclass in Japan? What are the responses by local activism? Drawing on the case of local medical activism in a subcenter of Tokyo, this paper will explore the shifting landscape of regimes of care for the urban underclass and its local unfolding of grassroots initiatives as a response to it. Worldwide, neoliberal policies gave rise to private initiatives of care for its citizens which were formally part of state welfare, and Japan has been no exception. Drawing on two years of fieldwork among medical professionals and volunteers at a biweekly mutual aid event that takes place in a park in Tokyo, I demonstrate how they make unique spaces for the urban underclass. I will specifically show 1) how the space is characterised by various looseness 2) how medical professionals in this event attempt to work on the persistent notion of meritocracy that constitutes neoliberal subjects, and 3) how the whole practice becomes “complicit” with neoliberal reconfiguration of care. By situating the findings in the discussion of care within the political economy paradigm of medical anthropology, I argue that these characteristics comprise the counter technologies to the neoliberal values that enable the conception of alternative social worlds, while the care itself is getting increasingly precarious.

Paper 2: *Dual Foreignness of Muslim Immigrants: Co-producing insights into racialization with young Muslim Women in Japanese higher education*

Yu Ai, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

While migrant Muslim women are central to the immigration integration debate in Western European countries, their counterparts in Japan receive considerably less attention. However, their increasing visibility in various Japanese social contexts, including universities, has begun to attract social interest. In this study, I explore how young Muslim women in Japanese higher education perceive their identities as both foreign and Muslim, as understood by their surroundings, and how these perceptions affect their experiences in the Japanese educational setting. I also reflect on my experiences as an international student who can pass as Japanese, comparing them with those of my Muslim interlocutors. Drawing on the narratives of young Muslim students and professionals from diverse backgrounds in Sendai, I find that they generally perceive religion as playing a minor role in their interactions with Japanese people. Instead, they identify themselves as being recognized as *gaijin* (foreigners) and frequently experience exclusion. I argue that their Muslim identity contributes an additional dimension to their perceived foreignness in Japanese society, which is marked by their visible differences, including physical appearance. Consequently, the strengthened foreignness they embody further accentuates their sense of otherness. Through this research, I aim to shed light on how both our shared and differing experiences can co-produce knowledge about the roles that visible differences, religion, and cultural identity play in the racialization process of immigrants within the Japanese context.

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Paper 3: *Grave Matters: Local Responses to Islamic Cemeteries in Japan*

Yuhei Hashizume, MA candidate, Meiji Gakuin University

Muslim migrants to Japan have been rapidly increasing and numbered about 230,000 people as of 2020. The arrival of Islamic religion and culture have occasionally caused concern among Japanese host communities. Islamic cemeteries are a case in point. Islamic cemeteries are distinctive because the body is buried intact whereas virtually all Japanese funerals entail cremation of the body. Cremation is strictly prohibited in Islam.

Consider the case of Hiji Town, adjacent to Beppu City, Oita Prefecture, where I did fieldwork last summer. The Muslim Association in Beppu planned to build a cemetery in 2018, but due to opposition from local residents, the project remains stalled. Local residents allege risk of water pollution and damage to the town's reputation; legal issues and bureaucratic objections from the local authorities have further complicated matters. The local residents' association finally approved the plan in May 2023, but this September Hiji elected a new mayor who is flatly opposed to selling the land.

My investigation revealed an interesting case of Islamic-Christian cooperation: the Beppu Trappist Monastery, located adjacent to the planned construction site, has been supporting the cemetery project. The monastery is now facing harassment from conservative local residents. The level of animosity towards "alien" religions raises doubts over the prospects for truly harmonious coexistence even if the cemetery is finally established.

This presentation looks at the response to Islamic cemeteries in local Japanese communities as a way into analyzing how Japanese people conceptualize cultural others.

Panel 5: Collaborative Methodologies (Room 9)

Chair: **Michael Shackleton**, Osaka Gakuin University

Paper 1: *Negotiating the Dilemmas of Co-Producing Knowledge with Immigrant Youth*

Tomoko Tokunaga, Associate Professor, University of Tsukuba

Anthropologists have discussed the ways to collaborate *with communities* and bring about changes. Participatory action research (PAR), a research approach and an epistemology, honors unique experiences, perspectives, and local knowledge of the community and engages community members to co-produce knowledge and take action for social change. While PAR scholars have emphasized sharing power with co-researchers and taking a bottom-up approach to produce knowledge, democratizing the knowledge production process is not simple. Scholars have cautioned about the danger of romanticizing the voices of co-researchers who may have internalized the mainstream norms and values and undermining the expertise of university-based researchers.

This presentation examines the ways in which I negotiated the dilemmas of co-producing knowledge with immigrant youth in the youth participatory action research (YPAR) project during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on the community partnerships among university, high school, and NPOs, I collaborated with immigrant youth researchers and NPO staff to examine the impact of the pandemic on mental and physical health among immigrant youth in Tokyo and aimed for youth empowerment.

One of the challenging moments arose during the process of selecting the research topic and formulating research questions. While unpacking academic language was essential, I continually encountered the tension of balancing etic and emic perspectives. I was unsure how to integrate the co-researchers' local knowledge, perspectives, and interests, while adhering to the disciplinary norms. Rather than romanticizing the concept of co-production, I critically examine the tensions and dilemmas of co-research with youth, and reflect on how I navigated these complexities.

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Paper 2: *Dilemmas and Possibilities of Doing Japan Anthropology in Interdisciplinary Collaborations*

Sachiko Horiguchi, Professor, Temple University Japan

Recent years have seen a rising expectation for Japan anthropologists to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations, due partly to funding schemes that encourage collaboration but also the structural peripherality of Japan anthropology within the anthropological community in Japan and the “academic world system” (Kuwayama 2017; Horiguchi 2024). Against this background, I reflect on the dilemmas and possibilities that my participation in interdisciplinary collaborations (from research on *hikikomori* to anthropology workshops for medical professionals) as a bilingual Japan anthropologist has brought about. I discuss how interdisciplinary collaborative research and/or practice may distance anthropology from its core in terms of methodology and theory in the process of co-production of knowledge. I also reflect on how being the *only* anthropologist in interdisciplinary projects may also promote essentialization of anthropology. At the same time, collaboration helps open up anthropology at both local and global levels and position it in vis-a-vis other scholarly fields, leading to relativization of the discipline. My reflections highlight the roles that Japan anthropologists can play in mediating anthropologists across borders and helping re-imagine the possibilities of anthropological practice.

Paper 3: *Growing Knowledge Together: Plant Cultivation as a Method of Collaborative Anthropology in a Japanese Neighborhood*

Mariia Ermilova, Adjunct Professor, Tōyō University

This paper examines how plant cultivation and gardening activities can serve as both a methodological tool and a means of collaborative knowledge production in anthropological research. Drawing on Anna Tsing's (2015) ethnographic work on mushroom foraging, which demonstrates how unexpected encounters in nature can create meaningful assemblages of people and practices, and Marilyn Strathern's (2017) insights into how plant propagation patterns can mirror social relationships and knowledge transmission, I analyze how shared cultivation practices create unique opportunities for co-producing knowledge while dissolving traditional boundaries between researcher and research subjects. Drawing from six years of auto-ethnographic fieldwork (2016-2022) as a young female researcher living in a Japanese neighborhood association building (NAB), I demonstrate how the cultivation of specific plants—from herbs of my Russian childhood like mint and thyme to Japanese wildflowers like ominaeshi (*Patrinia scabiosifolia*) and waremoko (*Sanguisorba officinalis*)—facilitated deep community engagement and knowledge exchange.

The analysis focuses on three key dimensions: First, how plant cultivation created what Oldenburg (1989) terms a “third place”—a social environment distinct from home and workplace—where cultural exchange could occur naturally, transforming my position from “foreign researcher” to “community gardener.” This shift was evidenced in local conversations that evolved from discussing Russian culture to sharing gardening knowledge. Second, following Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, I examine how shared material practices of gardening enabled knowledge co-production that transcended language barriers and cultural differences, particularly in interactions with elderly community members. Third, drawing on recent work in environmental anthropology (Alam et al. 2020), I analyze how working with plants revealed unexpected biogeographical connections between Russian and Japanese botanical heritage, creating new pathways for cross-cultural understanding.

This research contributes to methodological discussions in anthropology by proposing landscape-based activities as a valuable tool for collaborative fieldwork, particularly relevant in the Japanese context where communal gardening activities have been observed to contribute to “strengthening neighborly relations” (Miyata and Kimura 2015) and where landscape management has become a key challenge for aging local communities (Tsuchiya et al. 2014). It demonstrates how material practices like gardening can help overcome the traditional divide between researcher and community while generating rich ethnographic data. The findings suggest that incorporating ecological elements into anthropological methods can create more organic opportunities for knowledge co-production while fostering meaningful community engagement, particularly valuable in contexts where language or cultural barriers might otherwise impede traditional research approaches.

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Paper 4: *Forest for the trees: Third-party perspectives and co-production in fieldwork*

Mark Frisina, MA candidate, Sophia University, Japan

How does one accurately write about the thoughts and experiences of people unable to tell their story? From April 2024 until the present I have been making visits to a child care home (CCH) in Tokyo to interview staff members about issues relating to the children that reside there. Facilitated by a non-profit organization (NPO) that I spent summer 2023 working at as an intern, the conversations with staff members have helped me gain insight into the role nature and outdoor activities play in healthy development and addressing childhood trauma. More specifically, excursions to forests, creeks, and mountain campsites resulted in children becoming more confident in communicating and fostering relationships with other campers and staff. Using the ecological anthropology theory of human-nature interaction, I examine how the NGO and CCH staff utilize “back to nature” programs to support the development of children.

Further, I examine the interesting challenge involved with researching children’s experiences in nature without actually interviewing them. Taking into account the ethical and practical considerations involved with the study of marginalized children, this research presents another way to conduct fieldwork and gain valuable information. As the CCH workers live with the children and oversee their development, their insights were instrumental in the co-production of my research. I present that their observations and positions as CCH staff allow for a unique perspective that can more easily discern larger issues and solutions for the children.

Panel 6: Pop Culture (Room 10)

Chair: **Debra Occhi**, Miyazaki International University

Paper 1: *Car Camping (Shachūhaku) in Japan: Research en route*

Debra Occhi, Professor, Miyazaki International University

This presentation describes preliminary autoethnographic research on car camping, a currently popular leisure activity in Japan. The project emerged from everyday life practices including research trips for an ongoing research project on Pokémon decorated utility hole covers located in various tourist facilities across Japan. The necessity of travelling over distance to places not always easily reached by public transportation, exacerbated by concerns about public transportation brought by COVID-19 virus as well as a tight research budget encouraged me to join the ranks of Japanese automobile drivers who use their car as a sort of second home on the road. Taking this practice more seriously as a research topic in itself, I investigate creation of camp space in cars, as well as the spaces car campers gather. Through interaction and experience, car campers enjoy a loose community of shared knowledge and practice. Media representations of and by these car campers portray themselves as enjoying individualistic leisure in this era where tent camping has also enjoyed renewed popularity. Popular accounts of full-time campers abound on YouTube and are starting to emerge in print media. However, it is not enough to say that car camping is simply a carefree and cost saving way to conduct domestic travel. The practical necessity for creation of a camp-ready car as a personal disaster safety plan brings further understanding of what would otherwise be considered a leisure boom activity. This presentation analyzes data based on four years’ practice of this ongoing project of car camping.

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Paper 2: “*It Takes a Flock to Raise a Chick*”: *Shared Experiences and Knowledge Spaces in Networks of Pet Bird Parents in Japan*

Christopher Reichenbaech, Lecturer, Aichi Prefectural University

In Japan, birds have historically been viewed as social animals that are relatively affordable and subject to minimal regulatory constraints, rendering them suitable candidates for pets. However, their popularity remains low compared to dogs and cats. Birds appear only ideal for a mass market to a limited extent, which is underlined by the poor availability of avian veterinarians or pet stores offering bird supplies and confirmed by the meager economic use of birds in the form of mascots and merchandise on a national scale.

Against this background, the paper reflects for the first time on how the author’s experience living with Java Sparrows (*Lonchura oryzivora*, Japanese: *b_u_n_c_h_ō*) is transformed into knowledge and confirmed by a small but benevolent community of enthusiasts. For this purpose, the community network is considered symbolic (Cohen 1985/ Grodal 2018) due to the focus on a joint action—the wellbeing of the pet birds. Such a network is also more than a spatial feature (Anderson 1983). It is a complex yet loose structure connecting individuals and their avian companions throughout the Japanese cultural sphere.

The paper ultimately explores how the developing network among specialized pet shops, veterinarians, bird cafés, and bird sitters, along with platforms like YouTube and Instagram, fosters human-animal coexistence on a personal level. A vital aspect of this ongoing project is the recognition of pet birds not merely as objects of affection but as entities with their own subjectivity, playing a crucial role as inductive agents that invigorate the connections within the network.

Paper 3: *O-jōsama kotoba and online collective play through character language*

Hannah Dahlberg-Dodd, Project Assistant Professor, University of Tokyo

In April 2020, shortly after Japan instituted widespread public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Twitter saw the appearance of an account known as the “Kyoto University O-jōsama-bu.” Over the next several months, the number of *o-jōsama-bu* (‘young lady clubs’) on Twitter would number in the hundreds, nearly all claiming unofficial affiliation to universities and secondary schools while using the same fictionalized characterological style known as *o-jōsama kotoba* (‘young lady speech’).

With a focus on the emergence of *o-jōsama-bu* on social media, this presentation discusses the potentials of linguistic practice as a unifying force for community building and participation online. Specifically, I examine language use by club participants and how the use of *o-jōsama kotoba* allows participants to embody a temporary, discardable *o-jōsama* (‘young lady’) persona. *O-jōsama kotoba*, which is typically more associated with fictionalized, often fantastical media than day-to-day interaction, is characterized by the frequent appearance of stereotypically hyper-“feminine” linguistic features, especially personal pronouns and sentence-final expressions, and *o-jōsama* characters themselves exist in fiction as upper-class, refined, and depending on the narrative, even openly antagonistic. The Twitter users that utilize *o-jōsama kotoba* put the style to different use, however, using it as a kind of linguistic frame to document their day-to-day life and to connect with likeminded others.

This paper examines how users of *o-jōsama kotoba* operationalize the style as a means of interfacing with the digital world, with each other, and what about the characterological figure of the *o-jōsama* made it easy for widespread adoption.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

17:00 to 18:00 (Room 3)

“Co-producing Knowledge Across Localities and Positionalities: Reflections on My Involvement in the Movements for Sexual and Marital Freedom”

Ichirō Numazaki, Professor Emeritus, Tōhoku University

RECEPTION 18:30 to 20:30 (Midori Shokudo, 1F)

SESSION 3: SUNDAY, 10:00 to 11:30

Panel 7: Chinese/Korean Minorities (Room 8)

Chair: **John Mock**, Temple University

Paper 1: “*Gone With The Wind, Where Are Migrants Going? A Hope Study of Korean-Chinese Who Migrate to Japan or South Korea*”

Xinyang Li, MA candidate, University of Tsukuba

This research focuses on the hope of the new generation of Korean-Chinese ethnic minorities who started migrating from the Chinese Mainland to Japan or South Korea around 1990. The author sets this fieldwork in the Greater Tokyo Area and Seoul Capital Area, with periodic interviews in Tokyo and an annual one-and-a-half-month participant observation in Seoul from April 2023 to the present. Based on an investigation of changes in migrants' intimacy in the host country, the author explores what changes have occurred to the hope they individually carry in this process of changing interactions, and what such changes signify. Currently, the author is liaising with informants from different social classes and backgrounds in Japan and South Korea and finds that there are two perceptions of hope. Some individuals still hope that certain aspects of their lives become as good as they wish them to be, while others consider that they hold no hope at all, as well as showing a ‘hopeless’ lifestyle. The study analyses both hopeful and hopeless lives, ultimately arguing that even ‘hopeless’ migrants still subconsciously hope for something, pointing to either the persistence or discontinuity of hope as a way of lifestyle migration. This also provides a way of understanding the relationship between minority communities and mainstream society.

Paper 2: *Critiquing Dependency: Trans-Pacific Imaginaries and Zainichi Korean Dissidents in 1970s Japanese Minority Movements*

Chris Park, Visiting Researcher, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

This paper presents an ethnographic account of the Zainichi Korean diaspora that explores how Zainichi Korean dissidents mobilized in Third World solidarity in Japan while remaining connected to their homeland, Korea. It examines the intersection of diaspora, ethnicity, race, and nationalism in

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the political and social transformations of minority movements in Japan in the 1970s. It explores the ways in which minority movements emerged as trans-Pacific solidarity, transcending the limitations of physical borders. Drawing on interviews conducted in Japan, I will use them as the data to rearticulate individual experiences within the given social conditions and environment of ethnic discrimination. Inevitably, Zainichi Koreans sought to overcome the postcolonial state power that forced the integration of the former colonial subject to conform to the Cold War liberalism of the host society and homeland, respectively. In this critical conjuncture, Zainichi Koreans' individual and collective identities, citizenships, affiliations, ideas, and imaginaries were shaped by the process of migration and dislocation between colonial and postcolonial sites dominated by Japan, the two Koreas, and the United States. It argues that the trans-Pacific mobilization of Zainichi Koreans in the 1970s offered critical insights into the globally localized conditions and forms of hegemony embodied in the discourses of postcolonial developmentalism and Japanese high-growth. By presenting the experiences and voices of Zainichi Koreans, it suggests that the Zainichi Korean diaspora negotiated and navigated between the politics of belonging through participation in South Korean democracy movements and the politics of exclusion from their host society, Japan.

Paper 3: *Tokyo Adventure: Affect and Precariousness of Chinese students in Japan*

Xiaoyu Zhang, MA Candidate, University of Oxford

In contemporary Japan, the international student is a key driver of the nation's continued development. In 2023, near half of these students were from China. Given this group's importance, many scholars have studied their motivations, often attributing them to pragmatic factors such as seeking economic opportunities and the reproduction of sociocultural capitals. These perspectives are crafted within the macro context of global political, economic and national transformations. They are logically sound conclusions but fails to capture the nuanced experiences of individuals participating in movements. I believe a narrative that is grounded in individual experiences and focuses on the everyday realm is needed. In response, this research focusses on how affect determines the mobility of Chinese students studying in Japan, how their expectations interact with reality, and thereby reflects on their precariousness. During the six weeks of anthropological fieldwork in Tokyo, alongside participatory observation and thick description, this research incorporated autoethnography! and life-story telling" to capture the experiences and feelings of Chinese students in Japan.

This research argues that, besides the pragmatic factors, affective factors, such as individual aspiration, sense of proximity, and desires for freedom based on liminality also determines the movement of Chinese students to Japan. Moreover, this research discovered how those students' expectations intersect with racial dynamics and rhythms they experienced in Japan, constructing to their precariousness. This research aims to reconsider the role of educational immigrant in Japanese society today.

Panel 8: Newcomers Panel: Talented undergraduates Special Panel (Room 9)

Chair: **Greg Poole**, Professor, Dōshisha University

Paper 1: *Translating Terroir: An Ethnographic Study of Taste, Place, and Wine in Kansai, Japan*

Sara Kaneki, undergraduate, Dōshisha University

Terroir is a concept deeply connected to winemaking and has been studied through various academic disciplines such as anthropology, economics, marketing, and enology. While disrupted, it has traditionally been understood as the interaction between a region's natural environment (soil, climate, topography) and winemaking. However, terroir has now evolved to include cultural, historical, and social dimensions of

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the people within the landscapes. Terroir directly connects the taste to the place, reflecting the identity and heritage of a wine region.

This study examines the interpretations of terroir from the perspective of winemakers in Kansai, Japan, a minor and relatively new wine region. Despite the global attention given to terroir, there is limited research on Japanese wine regions, and none specifically on Kansai. Through fieldwork and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with winemakers, this research investigates how the concept of terroir has been introduced, interpreted, and adapted within the Japanese context, examining its cultural translation and significance.

Additionally, the study uses discourse analysis to investigate how wineries communicate their understanding of terroir through various channels, including websites, tours, promotional materials, and social media. This exploration will reveal how the narrative of terroir is crafted and conveyed to both local and global audiences. The study also considers possible connections between terroir and the Japanese concept of *fūdo*, coined by philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō, to explore how cultural and philosophical ideas influence perceptions of place. Interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, offering insights into the relationship between taste and place in Japanese winemaking.

Paper 2: *Living in a Japan Full of Bubbles: An Autoethnographic Exploration*

Kyal Banas, undergraduate, Temple University Japan

“They want to fill in the outline of Japan that they already know [when they come to Japan],” a professor who has lived in Japan for 20 years said to me. They told me this while I was conducting a series of interviews trying to explore how foreigners interact with Japan in the post-pandemic world. In the past decades Japan has cultivated and expanded strong images around the world through various forms of popular culture, then the 2020 Covid 19 global lockdown resulted in their popularity exploding. This explosion led to tourist booms from America and other countries after Japan opened up, but these popular images have resulted in many Americans and other English-speaking foreigners who come to live in Japan remaining trapped in their bubbles. This paper is an autoethnographic exploration of how I -an American college student- had interacted with Japanese popular culture prior to arriving in Japan and how I have negotiated with these bubbles in a post-pandemic Japan. I will examine my experiences with Japanese popular culture and how I attempted to pop my own bubble through conversations with other members of my own English-speaking bubble, an American University in Tokyo, Japan. Through these autoethnographic reflections, this paper will highlight the dilemmas I have encountered as I endeavored to peel back the layers of Japanese society. I will conclude by exploring possible ways we can help ourselves and others in our communities go beyond the bubble and experience a Japan they hadn’t before.

Paper 3: *Collaboration in Action: Interviews with Survivors of the AIDS Crisis in Japan*

Aria Saunders, undergraduate, Temple University Japan

It has now been more than four decades since the start of the global AIDS crisis. Much has changed in that time: the disease has been all but cured, and proper management of its spread has become commonplace. Japan has, as well, seen much in the way of positive change. Previous research on the policies during this era is extensive, and it covers the major factors behind the abject mismanagement of the AIDS crisis in Japan and the hemophiliacs who paid for this negligence with their lives. Less common, however, are the firsthand accounts of those affected who for the most part remain statistics as opposed to individuals with their own histories. When one is only tangentially aware of the goings-on of the world through second-hand sources, it becomes easy to forget that at their core these are all the lives of human beings. This separation of subject from researcher is what I have sought to address in my research; in order to breathe life into the stories of survivors, I have spoken directly to a number of men

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from all different backgrounds who lived through the Japanese AIDS crisis, including a licensed clinical therapist, an office worker, NGO Staff, and an accomplished anthropologist. Without these testimonies, their stories would remain untold among a sea of numbers that lose their personal meaning. Even the world's most faraway data is born from the human experience, and this is a fact any researcher must always remember.

Panel 9: The Great Wave, and After (Room 10)

Chair: **Alyne Delaney**, Tōhoku University

This session presents reflections on the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (and tsunami) through the memories, “kiroku”, and collaborations of local residents with anthropologists in the intervening years. Takakura and Delaney will discuss their recent monographs while Boret will present recent work on dynamics and politics or “Memory-scape” of 3.11.

Paper 1: *Life Beyond the Tōhoku Disasters: Autonomy and Adaptability in Coastal Japan.*
Alyne Delaney, Associate Professor, Tōhoku University

Paper 2: *Anthropology and Disaster in Japan: Cultural Contributions to Recovery after the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami*
Hiroki Takakura, Professor, Tōhoku University

Paper 3: *The ‘Segregation’ of Memory in a Japanese Post-disaster Community: A long-term study of the dynamics and politics of a Memory-scape of the Great East Japan Earthquake*
Sebastien Boret, Associate Professor, Tōhoku University

SESSION 4: SUNDAY, 12:00 to 13:30

Panel 10: Education (Room 8)

Chair: **Atsushi Sumi**, Meiji University

Paper 1: *Community and Educational Choices: Investigating the Motivations of IB Parents within Global and Local Educational Landscapes*

Isabelle (Shiyun) Zhang, PhD candidate, Osaka University

This research explores how parents of students in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program strategically navigate global and local education systems in response to the limitations of traditional educational classifications. It delves into the motivations that drive their choices, positioning these decisions within broader societal transformations linked to internationalization and global social mobility. Grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of cultural capital and symbolic power, the study examines how parents view the IB as an alternative educational trajectory that ensures their children's success in a globally competitive environment.

While the primary focus of this study is on the individual motivations of parents, it reveals implicit community dynamics. Parents, through their collective engagement with the IB, contribute to a form of symbolic distinction, co-producing a shared narrative that situates their children within

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an emerging transnational elite. This decision-making process reflects not only individual aspirations but also a collective response to globalizing forces within education.

By linking these educational choices to broader geopolitical questions, this work sheds light on how local and global power dynamics intersect in shaping both community identities and notions of global citizenship. It provides a critical lens on how education, as a site of symbolic and cultural production, serves as a tool for navigating and negotiating the complexities of contemporary social stratification.

Paper 2: *Collaborative Approaches to Sustainable Study Abroad Programs: Addressing Overtourism in Kyoto*

Conor Aherne, Director, Council on International Educational Exchange, Kyoto

In the context of escalating overtourism, this paper explores the role of community and collaboration in designing and implementing sustainable study abroad programs in Kyoto, Japan. Utilizing anthropological methods such as participant observation and ethnographic interviews, this research highlights how these frameworks can enhance educational experiences while mitigating the adverse impacts of (over)tourism on local communities and cultural heritage. Previous studies emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement in sustainable tourism practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Dredge & Jamal, 2015), suggesting that co-produced knowledge can foster more resilient communities. Through a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with students, educators, and local residents, this study examines the co-production of knowledge that emerges when diverse perspectives are integrated into program development. By situating participants as co-creators of knowledge, the study fosters an environment where local insights inform study-abroad curricula and contribute to community revitalization efforts. Furthermore, the paper critiques traditional solitary fieldwork paradigms, advocating for a more inclusive, group-based methodology that aligns with Japan's anthropological traditions (Yoshikuni, 2019). The findings indicate that collaborative approaches not only enhance the efficacy of sustainable tourism initiatives but also empower local communities by amplifying their voices in educational contexts.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on community-based solutions to a global challenge, proposing a model for future study abroad programs that prioritize ethical engagement and sustainability in the face of overtourism.

Paper 3: *Examining the Ideology of MEXT Kikokushijo Educational Policy and the Practice of Implementation at Educational Scenes: An Ethnographic Study of Language Instruction in a Japanese School for Returnees*

Serika Ito, undergraduate, Dōshisha University

The education for *kikokushijo* is unique to the Japanese educational scene. It has been discussed in the MEXT policies over decades, and some schools even provide *kikokushijo* pupils an advantaged special entrance pathway to enter the school. The term *kikokushijo* or *kikokusei* in Japanese has an inexplicit connotation that those pupils are somehow “different” from the pupils who are not categorized as *kikokushijo*, which is a point that is not emphasized in the English term “returnee”. As a *kikokushijo* who has attended the school for *kikokushijo*, I have been interested in comparing the policies presented by the MEXT and the actual educational scenes for *kikokushijo* to find the correlation (or lack of correlation) between the policy and its implementation. This study includes the ethnographical fieldwork conducted in a high school for returnees [*kikokushijo-ukeire-kō*] first-year class for *kikokushijo* students and interviews with those students and their teachers. I participated in

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the class for 2 weeks and interviewed 6 students and 5 teachers. This study aims to analyze the gap between the educational scenes for *kikokushijo* and the MEXT policies, through the content of interviews and literature reviews, to present the reality of education for *kikokushijo* and suggest how it can be interpreted.

Panel 11: Youth Social Disease (Room 9)

Chair: **Hisako Omori**, Associate Professor, Akita International University

In this panel, we will discuss the dynamics of social problems in kids, adolescent and youth people – up to people in their twenties – in different Japanese contexts. The discussion will focus on four main points of view, in which issues connected to the social problems that young people are facing emerge equally strong. This, we suggest, shows that the issue is cannot be approached from a single side, as it is organic and embedded in all the aspects of modern Japanese society. The dynamics that young people in Japan struggle with, from family and psychological distresses to poverty, from anxiety toward the future or the lack of positive guiding figures, are becoming more and more pressing in everyday life. Very often, however, these dynamics are not taken into consideration, or are approached with a wrong mindset. In particular, if one were to group these dynamics under the label of “youth social disease”, it would seem that solutions tend to seek palliative remedies based on the symptoms that the disease is showing, instead of going to work and trying to eradicate the cause of it. What we want to suggest, from our different points of view, is that it is not enough to tackle depression with drugs and therapy or child poverty with donations. Using four different perspectives, we hope to make clear how symptoms of the very same problem may emerge, and underline how more perspective and a proactive cooperation is the necessary next-step to work toward a solution. Therefore, we advocate the need for a discussion that focuses on cultural or social changes that could lead young people to be resilient towards adverse dynamics in order to do not suffer such disease, and help them believe that it is still possible to build a future for themselves. The panel will see four presentations plus a joined discussion, which we hope could serve as a basis for a broaden topic and start projects of cooperation, not only within the field of anthropology but also with other academic subjects, and the community.

Paper 1: *Youth in Crisis: Interconnected Youth Social Challenges and the Need for Academic Collaboration*

Robert Fracchia, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation aims to show the multifaceted social issues that Japanese young people are facing, drawing on three case studies derived from the author’s preliminary fieldwork: a girl struggling with depression and suicidal tendencies, a school dropout, and a young mother who became a parent at 17 and has to learn to become an adult by herself. All these phenomena seem to have roots in lack of communication with parents, weak social connections and inability to show resilience toward the dynamics of their environment. While literature often treats those phenomena as separate problems, treating them as “discrete pathologies”, the author wants to argue that these issues share interconnected roots that demand a holistic approach. Some causes of these issues in Japan may be the lack of a robust community, ineffective communication, and limited cooperation. These social dynamics contribute to create a feeling of isolation and anxiety among youth, manifesting in psychological distresses and a lack of resilience toward daily difficulties. The presentation, as a part of a panel, aims to show how these distinct experiences may be actually “intertwined”, suggesting that a comprehensive understanding of youth problems must consider the broader cultural framework and the dynamics of the society, starting from different perspectives.

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The panel, and this presentation in particular, will argue that the academic community has a critical role to play in addressing these issues. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among research fields, we can better understand the complexities of youth experiences and develop strategies that promote resilience. This approach must exceed the border of the academic community and stretch to include the society in which it operates. Hence, we advocate for a concerted effort to enhance communication and cooperation within Japanese society, enabling young people to build their futures. By recognizing the interconnectedness of their struggles and working collectively across disciplines, we can empower youth to face their challenges more effectively and promote a culture of resilience and support.

Paper 2: *What Masculinities do Japanese Young Men Need Now: Perspectives from those Admiring Female Characters*

Jiahui Ding, MA candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation aims to discuss what the masculinity Japanese young men are owning and need to own in modern Japanese society by analyzing those of who adore Disney movies and enjoy going to Tokyo Disney Resort (TDR). In modern Japanese society, it is not necessary for men to own as much masculinity as decades ago due to the stability the society possesses now. However, people still expect men to be masculine, such as being robust, having prominent working ability and so on, which leads to social problems like physical punishment at school, domestic violence, etc. The phenomenon of Japanese youngsters loving Disney, especially loving Disney female characters, may be giving us a hint of what they are struggling with their masculinity, and their love for Disney female characters may be actually showing a kind of new masculinity in this society. This research has been carried on by doing literature review, and both fieldwork research and interview at Tohoku University Disney Study Group. During the research, not only taking pleasure in visiting TDR is one of the features of the male members of the study group, but also consuming goods of female Disney characters and enjoying watching Disney princess movies as well. In conclusion, TDR provides an environment where these youngsters can lightly experience the feeling of “being a female” and comparatively consuming feminine goods freely, standing for the emergence and potential model of a masculinity owned by Japanese youngsters with both masculine and feminine features.

Paper 3: *Distorted view of mortality held by women in Japan: from the cases related to cosmetic surgery*

Miko Moriya, undergraduate, Tōhoku University

The purpose of this presentation is to discover the origin and complexity of the view about mortality held by women that invest significantly in cosmetic surgery in contemporary Japan. It will also try to show how, for these women, the pursuing of cosmetic surgery may become a motivation for continuing life.

Historically, techniques in plastic surgery were primarily employed for restorative purposes, such as treating scars from wartime injuries. Over time, however, cosmetic surgery has become integrated into the capitalist framework and is often seen as a way to conform to societal beauty standards. Cosmetic surgery procedures finalized at aesthetic purposes (*lookism*), seems to still maintain a negative nuance across generations. Yet, those very same *lookism* treatments may be considered as essential to achieve social and financial success, or even as life-saving medical treatments, by some. The positive perspectives on cosmetic surgery rarely become a topic of discussion in the existing literature, particularly regarding its potential impact on young people’s views on mortality, especially among women.

In this presentation, we will examine two women who act as “plastic surgery influencers” on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). These case studies illustrate the mixed public perceptions of cosmetic surgery. For both women, their motivations for pursuing cosmetic

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procedures as a means to enhance their will to live are a form of reaction toward their parent-child relationships, their self-esteem, their experiences in the adult entertainment industry, and their previous suicide attempts. The presentation will show that these factors, in fact, contribute to a complex and often distorted view of mortality among those seeking cosmetic surgery.

Paper 4: *The process of making child poverty invisible in Japan: disconnection from school, social welfare and supportive spaces*

Yota Watanabe, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation examines the phenomenon of child poverty in Japan, emphasizing the experiences of children themselves and the processes that render them and their struggles invisible. Unlike other countries, where previous anthropological studies have shown, worsening poverty often manifests in visible public signs, such as “begging” or homelessness, children in Japan frequently remain hidden within their homes. People with financial difficulties in Japan may become homeless or internet cafe refugees. In the case of children, however, they are not present in public spaces, and they tend to be confined due to familiar responsibilities, such as domestic work and caregiving. The result is that in Japan, signs of Japanese poverty become almost invisible. This trend has led to a lack of discussion on the dynamics that make such children to become invisible from the eyes of some actors, even when their situation is clearly visible for others.

This presentation pivots on the case study of two children based on the author’s fieldwork in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. The case study reveals that as the children’s poverty worsens, their connections with the outside world are severe in the form of truancy and disconnection from welfare. The consequence of their confinement inside the home is that those children become invisible to public space, schools, welfare agencies and supportive spaces. The vicious circle in which they fall is that the more their situation worsens, the more they become invisible to society, and this invisibility may lead to a major worsening of their situation.

Panel 12: Fukushima A (Room 10)

Chair: **Kyle Cleveland**

Paper 1: *Fukushima, Makko and Me: Emic-Etic Dialogue among Fukushima Evacuees*

Tom Gill, Professor, Meiji Gakuin University

The tremendous upheavals in the lives of the people caused by a major disaster such as the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant pose an obvious moral challenge to the anthropologist: is it alright to maintain a stance of cool detachment, or should one seek to make some positive impact on the situation? This challenge has caused a spike in interest regarding “public anthropology” (*kōkyō jinruigaku*) a sub-field of applied anthropology that seeks to work with the affected population to make things better.

Yet I have mixed feelings about public anthropology, however well-intentioned. Is it not presumptuous to imagine that we anthropologists can be a significant force for good in a disaster zone? And what of the principle that anthropologists should refrain from trying to change the societies they study?

My response has been to work with my informants to create writing that uses my semi-informed prompts to help them express their experiences. My main informant has been Masahiko Shōji, known as “Makko,” a farmer and horticulturalist in his sixties, with strong but slowly changing opinions on the disaster and the government’s response to it. Together we have authored two papers and there will be more to come. My presentation will discuss how this approach may answer the question I posed in an earlier paper: “What is the right thing for an anthropologist to do in Fukushima?”

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Paper 2: *Serendipity in Namie: Learning from Chance Encounters*

Yang Xue, Independent scholar

In this paper I will introduce two cases of chance encounters with people from the radiation-stricken town of Namie, who became key informants and significantly influenced my research. I first met Izumi in her recycling/coffee shop in Namie's temporary shopping street, and I encountered Yoji at a café. Both are U-turners—individuals who left Namie for Tokyo after high school and spent most of their lives far away before returning to Namie after the disaster. Both are in their 60s, live alone, and have committed themselves to recovery work in unique ways. They share a strong nostalgia for the traditional rural lifestyle, characterized by simplicity, tight-knit human relations, and a harmonious environment. Izumi opened her shop and has actively promoted old-fashioned wedding attire and rituals, children's *mikoshi* parades, community shrine-cleaning events, etc. Where Izumi has built a large social network, Yoji is a loner who takes photos and writes short essays about the dismantling of pre-disaster buildings in Namie, roadside Buddhist statues, obscure little shrines, etc. Yoji uploads these pictures and essays on Facebook to promote discussion.

Anthropologists conducting fieldwork in Japan often highlight the value of “serendipitous” encounters and the merits of a flexible, open approach (Hendry 2004; Yano 2004). In my case, it was these serendipitous encounters—whether on a farm road or in a “third place” like a café—that gradually expanded my network. As Yano (2004) notes, “serendipity doesn't just happen; it is partly bestowed, partly sought, and partly utilized.”

Paper 3: *Art and Archaeology in the Triple Disaster Area, Fukushima*

Yasuyuki Yoshida, Associate Professor, Hirosaki University

In recent years, art festivals have flourished in ageing communities throughout Japan. In many cases, an artist-in-residence scheme is embedded in each single project. Artists live in communities, develop relationships with local residents, research the area as they create artworks and installations. Their practice inevitably collaborates with the community, and sometimes creates artworks and installations in conjunction with the local residents and their landscapes. The author is involved in the Art and Archaeology International Exchange Research Group as an archaeologist. This paper focuses on the activities of that group in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, one of the areas hit by the triple disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In its activities, some interesting artworks have been co-produced in the relationships between four A's - art, archaeology, anthropology and architecture, as Tim Ingold advocated in “Making” - and the local residents.

LUNCH BREAK, 13:30 TO 14:30
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, ROOM 7

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SESSION 5: SUNDAY, 14:30 to 16:00

Panel 13: Rural Re/vitalization (Room 8)

Chair: **John Mock**, Temple University Japan

Paper 1: *Is the Concept of “Rural” Useful in 21st Century Japan: An Exercise in Cooperative Thinking*

John Mock Adjunct Professor, Temple University Japan

The anthropological literature is replete with references to rural and urban. Japan has followed the worldwide model of increased population concentrated into increasingly dense centers, in Japan very much the core, often at the expense of the peripheral, sometimes rural, areas. However, the overall population of Japan is now decreasing and, again, transportation and communication systems may have made the old concepts of “rural” outdated for most of peripheral Japan. The old sense of isolation and lack of contact with the outside world, typified in the old urban/rural duality, now exists only in the most isolated areas of the periphery. However, while the Japanese government is still pushing policies to expand the metropolitan centers (core) often to the detriment of the peripheral areas, the increase in transportation and communication has created a whole new system. This system, however, is exacerbated using the term “shi” (translated into English as “city”). About 90% of Akita Prefecture’s population lives a “shi” but only about 25% of the population live in a Densely Inhabited District.

This presentation will review the situation in Akita in the 21st century and examine the value of the term “rural”. The argument will be that, essentially, there is no longer very much (or any) areas that are classically rural and this means that the whole meaning of community has changed. I am hoping to elicit thoughts on how other analysts see the situation.

Paper 2: *Anthropological analysis of making data in Japanese rural revitalization*

Yuki Negi, PhD candidate, University of Tokyo

One of the major topics in the Japanese national policy for rural revitalization is to utilize digital technology. In particular, I would like to focus on the practice of “data” in Japanese rural areas for rural revitalization. Nowadays, various types of data are being used in rural areas in the context of rural revitalization, such as tourism, transportation, education and disaster prevention with subsidies provided by the national government. In the remote island of Ama-cho, Shimane Prefecture, West Japan, which is famous for its active rural revitalization, the project for utilizing data is also being conducted. That project was conducted in collaboration with local government officials, local residents, local organizations, and a Tokyo-based tech company to visualize the island's economy and society in the form of data. It aimed to replace the rural revitalization measures that are discussed, planned, and implemented based on the tacit knowledge of local government officials and local residents who have lived in the island for a long time, with measures based on explicit knowledge of a database and that include urban-rural immigrants.

The purpose of this presentation is to reveal the process of creating data in Ama-cho from a cultural anthropological perspective. Specifically, I will focus on what objects in Ama-cho are selected as the objects of conversion to data, how they are “constructed” as data, and how the data are socially “used” in the island community.

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Paper 3: *Navigating Uncertainty: Climate Change and the Future of Seaweed Cultivation in Japan*

Miku Narisawa, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

This presentation explores the adaptation of seaweed aquaculture to climate change in Japan, with a specific focus on a case study from Higashimatsushima City in the Tohoku region. The study highlights the livelihoods of coastal communities, the modernization of seaweed (nori) aquaculture, and how local farmers have cultivated a reciprocal relationship with the ocean amid these challenging times, drawing on fieldwork and recent studies. Seaweed cultivation is a cornerstone of the local economy and an integral part of Japanese food culture. Over the past two years, many seaweed farmers have experienced significant impacts from climate change, including rising water temperatures and increasingly unstable nutrient balances. The uncertainty surrounding these environmental threats has had profound effects on local marine ecosystems, fishing markets, and traditional practices. Nevertheless, these challenges also underscore the complex intersection of human domestication and ecological uncertainty. Finally, the presentation introduces the "Nori Summit," a new initiative where over 150 seaweed farmers from across Japan come together to share their experiences and innovative solutions for confronting the unknowns posed by climate change.

Paper 4: *At the Intersection of Profit and the Sacred: An Analysis of Ise Dai Kagura from the Business Model Perspective*

Masanao Kawakami, Professor, University of Hyōgo

Carmen Sapunaru Tamas, Professor, University of Hyōgo.

The current presentation is a multidisciplinary approach (business and anthropology) to the analysis of a Japanese enterprise closely associated with the sacred: Ise Dai Kagura, a performing group which is currently a designated intangible cultural property in Japan.

Ise Dai Kagura are an itinerant group of artists who at the same time perform sacred rituals. They descendants of *onshi*, a type of low-ranking priests from the Ise Shrines who provided not only spiritual, but also practical support (travel advice, accommodation, meals) to pilgrims visiting Ise. The sacred and the business aspects are intrinsically connected here, as the place seen as the most important in Shinto history is at the same time the one which developed one of the oldest banknotes in the world, as part of the extensive travel network supporting the pilgrims.

The current study will look at the Ise Dai Kagura group from the business model perspective, attempting to analyze the mechanism that ensured the economic survival of these groups across centuries. How did they develop a business model starting from prayer and performance? What type of profit generation does their business follow? How is it sustainable in the 21st century—is it self-supporting or is it based on government support? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this paper, using both ethnographic and business model tools.

Panel 14: Alternatives (Room 9)

Chair: **Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen**, Sōka University

Paper 1: *Re-Classification of Culture as Methodology Amidst Planetary Crises*

Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen, Professor, Sōka University

In March 2024, Soka Gakkai youths organised with Green Peace Japan, the Japan Youth Council, and other NGOs an event to raise awareness about the danger of Climate Change and Nuclear Weapons. Supported by UNHCR, around 100 Japanese companies, famous Japanese comedians and singers, it attracted almost 70,000 in-person youth participants and 500,000 online. Held at the Japan

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National Stadium participants were spectacularly entertained, organisers hoping to spark interest in global issues amongst largely disengaged Japanese youths. Change in behaviour is, however, hard to come by, a challenge proving central to our planetary crisis: ‘even if we know, most do not act upon that knowledge.’

Greenhouse gas emissions threatening the biosphere and destruction of nature continue under the mantra of economic growth. “The challenge is to reconnect economics to ecology without basing theories of value on nature” (Hornborg 2024: 313). In light of this, I explore how youth climate action in Japan is embedded in the growth paradigm aimed at finding technical solutions. I contend this presents a multi-layered resistance to the cultural change required to achieve substantive sustainability. Secondly, from public events co-organised with Soka University students in 2023-4, I show how anthropology can transform the cultural logics of growth, studying together the way objects (like meat) are manipulated to deflect attention away from human action. Studying together anthropologically becomes here a method to not only record climate change as essentially cultural, but to explore what happens in interactive spaces of cultural re-classification, illuminating the power of anthropology to transform the world by making its methodology a way of life.

Paper 2: *Body Analogous to Tomatoes: Re-drawing the Nature/Culture Boundary through Growing and Eating Shizen (naturally)*

Kozue Ito, Assistant Professor, Hokuriku University

The recent trend of ethical consumerism has accelerated the spread of veganism, vegetarianism, and its variations. In Japan, *Shizen-shoku* (literally, natural food) is an ambiguous yet intriguing term for one who has interest in eating healthier. The notion gained popularity in the late 1960s when food pollution and poisonous additives became a huge social problem. In this sense, science (=kagaku) must be demarcated from nature and carefully excluded. Since then, increasing *Shizen-shoku* specialty shops have become a sanctuary of "healthy" and "natural" foodstuffs. Most of all such foodstuffs, especially fresh foods are grown without agricultural chemicals and even fertilizers. Though it is almost impossible to trace back the single origin of such “sustainable” agricultural movement, precedent studies have focused on anthroposophy that gives theoretical and spiritual basis for holistic, Biodynamic Agriculture in Europe and analyzed it as “a peculiar form of” Descolian Analogism (Breda 2016). People seeking for *Shizen* foodstuffs often grow vegetables and rice by themselves in a way they think sustainable and more “natural,” however, as same as anthroposophy, criticized for its dependance on spiritualism and pseudoscience. This paper argues not the Analogism of their practice but how they re-draw the boundary between nature and human beings through growing and eating “*Shizen*.” By carefully excluding bodily unreality, which is based on modern science but unacceptable for them, they try to throw their body (back) to the side of nature through finding micro analogy between body and nature.

Paper 3: *Human and Non-Human Collaborations in an Era of Transition: Communal Wood-firing in Japan and beyond*

Liliana Morais, Special Associate Professor, Rikyō University

Firing ceramics has traditionally been a collective activity involving both human cooperative labor and the collaboration of humans with non-human agents, such as wood, clay, and fire. In the post-war period, improved accessibility of small gas and electric kilns encouraged the rise of studio pottery as an individual artistic endeavor. On the other hand, countercultural movements shaped by a desire for community, self-sufficiency, and sustainability have sparked a revival of wood firing in Japan and beyond. Rejecting the modernist ethos of productivity and efficiency, experiments in

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wood-firing accompanied alternative modes of living and working in rural areas, some more communal than others.

Based on formal interviews and informal exchanges with ceramic practitioners in Japan, Portugal, and Brazil, I start by exploring the contemporary allure of this ancient and labor-intensive practice within a rising societal interest in community and collaboration, drawing on the sociological concept of *resonance*. Through an autoethnographic and ecological lens, I then turn to a description of the embodied and sensory elements involved in the firing of ceramics at high temperatures in Japanese-style wood-fueled kilns. Drawing from field research in rural regions across three countries/continents, I highlight the collaborations with others, both humans and otherwise. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the role of craft and making together for building community and its resilience in rural regions struggling with depopulation, marginalization, and economic decline, and to imagine future alternatives within a transition to a post-industrial, post-growth society.

Paper 4: *Sanseitō and the Community of People in Politics*

Alex de Winter, MA candidate, Ritsumeikan University

Sanseitō (参政党), the “Party of Do-It-Yourself!”, came into mainstream focus and electoral success during the Coronavirus pandemic. Populist in nature and aiming to bring in a new kind voter, one that had not engaged in politics before, they also brought into the mainstream a new kind of political activism. Their use of savvy marketing and emphasis on social media stands outside the norm of Japanese politics, characterised by its traditionalism.

Sanseitō brought in a variety of people, from mothers interested in the contents of their children’s education, to those concerned with alternative health and natural food, and a variety of those responding to COVID-19. The party prides itself on a philosophy of learning together and doing politics as one, with an emphasis on developing ideas that the party then enacts and creating mutual learning spaces. In creating a space for these disparate groups to come together as one party, we can question how one creates a community from those with little in common. Where do people come together? Where do they separate? What does it mean for one to put aside personal disagreements in service of a greater cause – and can we call that a community?

Panel 15: Fukushima B (Room 10)

Chair: **Tom Gill**, Meiji Gakuin University

Paper 1: *Reaping the Nuclear Whirlwind: The Plume Politics of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*

Kyle Cleveland, Associate Professor, Temple University Japan

The Tohoku disasters of March 11, 2011 were the most expensive disasters in the modern history of the world, and their impact were readily evident: the largest earthquake ever measured in Japan, a tsunami that swept along the Sanriku coast, claiming 18,000 lives, and a total station blackout at the Daiichi Nuclear Power plant in Fukushima. With 3 reactors in meltdown, radiation spewed forth from the reactors onto the nearby villages, leading to haphazard evacuations, and over the next decade a massive exit migration removed thousands from the region, as fears of radiation exposure upset the balance of life, and threatened the agricultural and fishing industries that had sustained the region.

This paper examines how radiation exposure and its perceived associated harm has been negotiated by governmental entities (political and legal), environmental and nuclear scientists, scholars, media portals and those most affected by the radiation that irrevocably altered their lives and continues to cast a shadow of doubt upon their long-term health and well-being.

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The analysis focuses especially on the the village of Namie (and the subdistrict of Tsushima) that suffered the highest levels of radiation exposure outside the plant facilities in the immediate aftermath of the onset of the Fukushima nuclear crisis. Tragically, the citizens of Namie were given no guidance from the national or prefectural governments (or the Nuclear authorities) and were evacuated directly into the path of the radioactive plume that escaped containment from the ruined reactors, after core meltdowns followed when the tsunami inundated the plant, causing a total station blackout and a loss of power that could have stabilized the situation by maintaining reactor core cooling. Namie, along with the evacuated villages nearby the nuclear plant, have become emblematic of the government's lack of proper crisis management and the nuclear industry's failures to take preventative measures and implement timely emergency response as the crisis spun out of control.

This presentation is based upon ethnographic fieldwork that included multiple research trips to Fukushima (including 8 trips to the Fukushima Daiichi (F1) Nuclear Power Plant; and, an associated visit to the Daini Plant (F2), and interviews with city government officials in Namie and the evacuated villages of Kawauchi, Futaba, Kamioka, and Minami-Soma, and nuclear evacuees who fled their homes in duress (many of whom remain displaced and cannot return to reinhabit their homes and their ruined land, due to radiation exposure).

This research charts the trajectory of the nuclear disaster in the near-term crisis phase and documents the longer term process of recovery, as the township government and others litigate legal action against TEPCO to receive compensation for their suffering and be allowed to reinhabit their land and build new homes once decontamination efforts have been effectively implemented.

Paper 2: *The Tohoku Triple Tragedies – Collaborative Research, Experiential Education, and Reconstructive Narratives of Disaster*

David Satterwhite, Adj. Associate Professor, Temple University Japan

The devastation wreaked on the Tohoku region by the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami, magnified days later by the triple meltdown of Fukushima Dai-ichi reactors, sparked both political upheaval and an outpouring of civic engagement, including unprecedented volunteer efforts and a nationwide Kizuna solidarity. Reactions were varied – from independent monitoring of radiation readings in the absence of credible official figures; on-the-ground NPO volunteer mobilization; to concerted efforts to assess the displacement of people and their communities.

The academic community also sprang into action, first in efforts by individual scholars, followed by a new form of collaborative, interdisciplinary synergy to address critical urgencies. This paper highlights TUJ faculty responses to multiple pressing needs: 1) more accurate ethnographic accounts from displaced communities (such as Namie); 2) pedagogical/student-focused consciousness-raising re the enormity of the nuclear calamity itself and its impact on real people, their social networks, the national polity/psyche, and ongoing international repercussions; and 3) 'experiential education' in a series of excursions to the tsunami-impacted communities, interviews with participants and leaders therein, and crucial nuclear site visits. Methodologies utilized reflect a mix of disciplines, including ethnographic interviews, monitored site-visits to irradiated communities guided by displaced residents, ten-plus TEPCO tours inside both Dai-ichi's facility and less-studied near-meltdown Dai-ni reactors, as well as comparative-tragedy site-visits to Kobe and Hiroshima, each accompanied by kataribe or hibakusha. These efforts go beyond 'dark tourism' and are consciously-crafted 'experiential education', intentionally empowering and enabling students to participate throughout in order to nurture critical thinking as first-person witnesses to tragedies, social change agency, and history-in-the-making.

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Paper 3: *Thyroid cancer in Fukushima: a potential contribution to citizens' science advocacy*

Chiara Ramponi, PhD candidate, Tōhoku University

After the nuclear accident occurred at Fukushima Daichi in 2011, the ministry of Environment and the local hospital launched an on-going thyroid cancer screening for the young residents of the prefecture. The high figures reported have cracked open a conflict between institutions and local residents around the long-term health risk in the region.

Along these 13 years, citizen scientists have engaged in various health and radiation monitoring activities in order to keep a trustworthy, bottom-up account of possible pathological pathways, both spatially and chronologically; spatially, because despite the State's decontamination efforts, the still uneven distribution of pollutants in the region might be relevant information to the people who have decided to return; chronologically because, as in the case of thyroid cancer and other physical/psychological ailments, the full extent of the disaster might still be revealing itself in the residents' bodies.

Despite these efforts, a growing branch of post-Fukushima studies points out how the damage-focused approach tends in time to exhaust these movements momentum. Their very investment in a quantitative estimation of risk inevitably fails them, when challenging institutions with greater economic resources and scientific credibility.

CLOSING PLENARY SESSION

ROOM 3, 16:15

FILM: The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom

directed by Lucy Walker (2011)

introduced by Kyle Cleveland

ANNOUNCEMENT: WINNERS OF THE BEFU AND BOOKMAN PRIZES

CONFERENCE ENDS

About 17:15