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Book of Abstracts

Day 1 April 4

Keynote lecture

Prof. Mayumi SAKAMOTO (University of Hyogo): *A Century-long Annual Ritual for Commemoration of Disaster -1925 North Tajima Earthquake and Kinosaki, Japan*

Disasters are transient events. No matter how severe the damages were, people who experienced the disaster become older, and more people who did not experience the disaster are born. Collapsed buildings were rebuilt, debris were removed, and it becomes difficult to see visible traces of the damage. In some cases, however, people continue to remember disaster memories over time. This study tries to find out how historical disaster are transferred overtime focusing annual rituals.

One case of a disaster whose memory has been passed down through generations is the 1925 North Tajima Earthquake, a massive earthquake of Magnitude 6.8 struck at the North Tajima Region, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan on May 23, 1925. Immediately after the earthquake, fires broke out from collapsed buildings and spread throughout the urban areas, causing enormous damage.

One hundred years have passed since the earthquake occurred, but May 23, a date of the earthquake remains as a special day for local people. In Kinosaki-town, the commemoration ceremony is still held on May 23th. The priests from all these temples gather Onsenji Temple, in front of Monument to the Spirits of Victims by Fire of North Tajima Earthquake regardless of their religious affiliation. The Kinosaki Fire Brigades conducts a fire drill on this day and after the drill, the heads of all fire brigades also attend the ceremony.

In Tai village, a prayer ceremony known as “Osendo Mairi” is held each year at the Yasaka Shrine, which houses the “Ujigami (local deity)” of the district and it is located on a hill in the center of the village. Osendo Mairi is a traditional Japanese prayer circuit that involves walking back and forth a thousand times around a shrine with a prayer each time. On May 23, community people gather at the temple at 6.00 a.m. and begin their prayer by picking up a wooden tag from a box located at the center of the main shrine.

In both communities, the disaster commemoration ceremonies and the prayers initially began to mourn the victims of the earthquake, but eventually evolved to include issues related to the safety of people in the

community. Today, disaster commemoration has become a part of everyday life and has been transferred over time.

Session 1

Alyne E. DELANEY (Tohoku University): *Maintenance of Personal Rituals in the Face of Changing Landscapes in Miyagi, Japan*

Residents of coastal Japan have interacted with their coastal and sea environments throughout history. Such interactions give rise to new practices, livelihoods and ways of life. They also change the local environment, through fishing, diving, and the alteration of the coastal area through building hard structures such as seawalls. The 1950s-60s and now, the years immediately post-3.11, have seen significant changes in this regard.

Despite changes over time, people's interactions with the coastal zone continue. This paper presents research on rituals undertaken as a result of local residents' connections with the sea, its kami, and with one another. In particular, rituals around protection of fishermen and seafarers, as well as the rituals around those who have died at sea will be presented. I ask, what, if any, impacts do changes in physical landscapes have on local practitioners and local culture.

Mitchell W. SEDGWICK (London School of Economics): *Human Relations of 3.11 and the Intellectual Politics of Infrastructure: Thoughts on Alyne Delaney's Fieldwork in Miyagi*

In this presentation I draw on Alyne Delaney's compelling ethnographic account in Miyagi. This important resource suggests any number of considerations. Among them: the vicissitudes of longitudinal fieldwork for researcher and community alike, and the centrality of anthropological research grounded in a specific place and social space. Here I elaborate, however, upon the long term historical and, so, deep trajectory of human interaction with, its impact on, and, so, changes upon specific environments, e.g., that process which, literally, 'in practice', makes us human. To make this point I highlight the specific context of the 3.11 disaster and its afterlives, including how this particular period has informed academic analysis. Fourteen years on, there is an impressive post-3.11 body of work. Outside of the Fukushima nuclear site, still melting down, I have noted the considerable attention paid to Tohoku's new, and highly-imposing, seawalls. As a researcher in Tohoku for over 30 years, naturally I (also) find them alarming. However, seawalls seem to have stimulated, perhaps especially for researchers first coming to Tohoku after 3.11, a suggestively over-obvious analytical prioritizing of physical infrastructure per se, e.g., in common sense usage, as hard structures. And, in turn, a theoretical engagement with the subfield of 'infrastructure studies' which, beyond the subtle handling by its originators, is inclined to analytical claims, and new language, for intellectual engagements that anthropology has been taking seriously for decades.

Delaney's extensive research, grandly historical while attentive, in this case, to local ritual -- that is, research grounded in the gentle steps of fieldwork -- reminds us that landscape and community in Japan have been co-configuring for millennia. Such reconfigurations are the basis of human/social life -- aren't they? -- and, so, lay at the core of what we, anthropologists, work with, what we try to explain. However much seawalls

dominate the landscape of coastal Tohoku, rather than their reification, it would perhaps be more productive to understand seawalls as just another artifact of reconfiguring tensions between persons in places -- in communities, in livelihood, in ritual, in governance, etc. -- and, so, 'in practice', human relations.

Sébastien Pennellen BORET, Hyejeong PARK (Tohoku University): *Daily Lives and Coping Practices of People with Disability during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake*

This presentation examines the daily lives and coping practices of people with disability during the evacuation phase of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The UNDRR reported that around 80% of people with disabilities face difficulties during disaster evacuations. Receiving non-adapted disaster preparedness, this vulnerable population will likely be left at higher risks when facing hazards. An NHK documentary also revealed that the mortality rate during the Great East Japan Earthquake proportionally was twice as much higher among the population of disabled people (2.06%) than non-disabled people (1.03%); the Japan Disability Foundation suggests that the reality might have been more alarming. One of the hurdles to providing for people with disability during disasters is a lack of understanding of their actual needs, conditions and also capacity in daily life. The erroneous preconceptions about disability stop society from identifying the needs of people with disability and building the coping capacity for disasters. Japanese vacation shelters are renowned for being ill-adapted for people with disability. Our research reveals that families with children with a disability would rather stay in their damaged homes or even sleep in their cars than enter these shelters. They feared prejudice, discrimination, and causing 'meiwaku' to their fellow refugees. Drawing from interviews and archives, our research examines the reality of the lives of people with disability during the aftermath. In particular, our study shows how people who experience constant struggles in their daily lives and encounter disasters as somewhat 'normal' albeit exacerbated struggles faced in their ableist society.

Julia GERSTER (Tohoku University), Kaoru UEDA (Stanford University): *Coping with Trauma Through Storytelling: Insights from Disaster Kamishibai*

As a form of storytelling, Kamishibai, or Japanese paper theater, has gained prominence as a medium for conveying experiences of traumatic events. Its application spans both recent disasters, such as the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, or the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that marks its 30th Memorial Day this year, and historical calamities like the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake and the atomic bombings. While existing research has largely focused on disaster storytelling's educational impact on audiences, this study shifts the focus to the mental health effects on performers.

Drawing on narrations and interviews with Kamishibai performers from the Machimonogatari Seisaku Iinkai in areas affected by the 2011 disaster, this research explores how storytelling aids in trauma recovery. We argue that Kamishibai's unique features—such as the flexibility to adapt narrations to painted images or tailor stories to the audience, its ability to anonymize sensitive details, and the interactive nature of performances—can serve as effective tools for trauma coping among disaster-affected individuals. This study highlights Kamishibai's potential as a medium not only for preserving disaster memory but also for fostering resilience and emotional healing.

Day 2 April 5

Keynote lecture

Joy HENDRY (Professor Emerita, Oxford Brookes University)

Ritual and Symbolism has always been a favourite subject of mine, and in this presentation, I plan to tell you why I think, when studying Japan, it gives us anthropologists an edge. Other disciplines talk of signs and symbols but I don't think they go quite far enough! Some of what I present might be familiar from my work, if you know any of it, but a lot of it should be familiar from yours, though I hope we might come up with some new ways of thinking about it.

Session 2

David UVA (Doshisha University): *Edo and Meiji Japan through Foreign Eyes: Historical Contextualization and Source Criticism*

Studying Japanese history in English-taught undergraduate programs at Japanese universities poses diverse challenges for international students. Traditional lecture-style classes tend to focus on general historical narratives and make limited use of historical documents. As a result, students often struggle to make sense of fragmented or situational information when confronted with specific accounts or texts describing particular cultural practices. The zemi classroom presents a dynamic learning environment to meet these challenges. At the Institute for the Liberal Arts at Doshisha University, my intermediate seminar focuses on texts written in English by foreign visitors to Edo and Meiji Japan such as Englebert Kaempfer, Phillip Franz Von Siebold, Ernest Satow, H. B. Montgomery, and Basil Hall Chamberlain. These authors provided English-speaking audiences with valuable insights into Japan from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. Through research, reading, writing, and discussion students critically evaluate these accounts and situate them within their historical context. In my presentation, I will outline how this seminar enhances historical thinking through its three key learning objectives. First, students learn to critically analyze primary sources, such as diaries, memoirs, and travel guides. To understand how they came into being, they trace their authenticity and examine the backgrounds of the authors. Second, through research and discussion, students reconstruct the historical context of Edo and Meiji Japan and explore the culture, society, and localities described by the foreign visitors. Finally, through historical perspective-taking, contextualization, and historical empathy, students acknowledge the complexities and diversity of cross-cultural interactions.

Akira SHAH (Keio University): *Minoritization as Ritual Practice: Nihonjinron and Identity Imposition*

Minoritizing identity can be interrogated as a process of ritual practice by acting representatives of majoritized others. Drawing on the context of Japanese society's mainstream cultural nationalism (i.e., 'Nihonjinron'), this paper uses the identity of 'Nihonjin' ('a Japanese person') to conceptualize a three-

stage process for how many social minorities are born. To illustrate this theory of identity imposition, concession, and objectivization – or ‘ICO process’ – I introduce five experiences gathered through semi-structured interviews of those labelled ‘Japanese returnees’ (i.e., ‘kikokushijo’) and ‘Japanese biracials’ (i.e., ‘hāfu’). Supplemented by select vignettes of those identified as ‘foreigners’ (i.e., ‘gaikokujin’) – produced from several months of person-centered ethnographic fieldwork – I demonstrate how the ICO process can be synonymous with both racialization, and culturalization independent from socio-genetics. Negotiable aspects and intersectional social hierarchies notwithstanding, I emphasize minoritized peoples’ forced concession with the ritual of identity imposition made by majoritized actors.

Angelica CABRERA (Osaka University): *Ontological ambiguity: Crisis, hyperfiction and social narratives in postmodern Japan*

This proposal for individual presentation argues that, within the period of postmodernity, fiction entered into everyday life through globalisation, speculative capital, technology, and the increase of non-places. Fiction frames reality as hyperfictional, leading to time-space alterations that put the self in a state of ambiguity, or what I call ontological ambiguity. I propose a critical study of Japanese postmodernity through recourse to hyperfiction, taking Yasutaka Tsutsui’s (1934) novel *Paprika* (2018 [1993]) as an example, known internationally due to its eponymous animeadaptation in 2006 by Satoshi Kon (Cabrera, 2019). This proposal presents the results of the book chapter “Ontological ambiguity: crisis, hyperfiction and social narratives in postmodern Japan”, which forms the volume *The anthropology of ambiguity*, published by Manchester University Press in May 2024.

Session 3

Preservation and Sustainability of Knowledge: Rituals and Learning in Peripheral Japan (PANEL)

These four presentations examine different aspects of how skills, sometimes portrayed as “traditional” are learned and maintained outside the metropolitan center. The areas of Japan outside of the metropolitan centers are often represented as being stagnant storehouses of tradition, interesting as museums but not important in the ongoing functioning of the society. In contrast, we are examining four different aspects of how knowledge is shared and sustainably preserved in adapting to a rapidly changing Japan. Rituals, social and sacred, are inherently connected to the learning, sharing and preserving processes.

Kaeko CHIBA (Akita International University): *Strength of Ritual in Digital Archives?*

In recent years, it has become clear that in Akita, as in much of rural Japan, folk culture is in danger of disappearing. This is, in part, the result of an aging population, low birthrates, and relative poverty. In recent years, there have been efforts to preserve disappearing traditions through the digitalization of two-dimensional art, recordings of performances and activities, and archiving of hereditary databases.

Laudable as these efforts are, few studies in folk culture research have empirically addressed how it should be digitally archived. Based on research in the Akita digital archives, the following recommendations emerge: an archival model that emphasizes respecting the direct voices of informants, the collaboration with students, and an interdisciplinary approach.

This presentation shares archive model by emphasizing direct voices, collaboration with students and interdisciplinary approach. It further discusses how the strength of ritual should/can be presented in digital archives. To what extent can we convey the strength of ritual through our smartphone or computer screen? If there are different interpretation to the local ritual and belief by informants, which voices should we share in digital archives?

Miku NARISAWA (Tohoku University): *Transformation of Traditional Practices in Seaweed Cultivation: Towards Achieving Sustainability*

This presentation explores the role of Nori seaweed cultivation in promoting sustainability and highlights its cultural and environmental significance. A case study from Higashi-Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture, illustrates how nori seaweed farmers navigate their personal identities as stewards of the ocean while preserving their lifelong work in seaweed cultivation. The city is known for producing high-quality nori seaweed due to its ideal geographical conditions, with rich nutrients from the surrounding mountains contributing to the cultivation process.

Nori seaweed cultivation is a critical element of Japan's cultural heritage, sustaining local livelihoods, ensuring food culture, and fostering a deeper understanding of oceanic ecosystems and climate. Traditionally, fisheries have been passed down within families, with a particular emphasis on male succession, reflecting the cultural significance of maritime livelihoods. However, contemporary environmental challenges have prompted fishers to prioritize coastal resource management and sustainable practices.

Compared to other types of fishing, seaweed cultivation is generally more sustainable, representing a more environmentally responsible approach within the fishing industry. This study examines the sustainability of seaweed aquaculture practices through the lens of fishers' livelihoods and the coastal communities they support. Specifically, it focuses on fishers' attachment to their local environment, the preservation of traditional fishery practices, and the rituals that maintain the cultural connections to the ocean. The findings highlight the role of Nori seaweed cultivation in bridging cultural practices with environmental sustainability.

John MOCK (Temple University Japan): *Ritual and Sustainability in Japanese Crafts*

Japan is depopulating, aging, and losing a lot of its hand crafts and traditional arts. It is, in fact, a lot like other industrialized, relatively wealthy countries. However, there is an interest in preserving at least some of these crafts and arts, and often, at the same time preserving the historical legacies. Akita prefecture is one of the areas that is depopulating the most rapidly, has one of the oldest populations in Japan and is one of the areas losing the crafts and arts of the past. Some of these may be preservable as museum pieces, and

should be, but are probably not sustainable such as straw-work raincoats and snow boots. Others may be sustainable, partly through ritual relationships such as apprenticeships. While there are several traditional crafts that could be considered, such as pottery and lacquerware, this presentation primarily on two crafts that are largely taught through an apprenticeship system, both steeped in ritual that provide much of the essential social fabric, carpentry and basketry. The larger category of traditional (and semi-traditional) carpentry (including joinery), is taught in trade schools and through apprenticeships. While much the commercial work no longer uses the traditional tools, materials or social relationships, there is, arguably, a sustainable base, especially in maintaining older structures such as tea houses. The second example, Akebi vine basketry, is a variation of traditional basketry. It might survive as a sustainable tradition because the finished product commands a very high price.

Both crafts can be partly learned through digital means, such as openly available digital recordings, but the bulk of the training is person-to-person and very much connected to manual muscle training as well as other forms of learning. Much of the physical training involves a partly ritualistic relationship between the teacher and the student.

Session 4

Alina-Alexandra HARA (Independent Researcher): *Ritual and landscape. The role of landscape in the spiritual life of post-WW2 Yaeyama “immigrants”*

The global polycrisis has made it essential for us to imagine not only the way we live, but also the landscapes where our lives unfold.

This presentation explores how landscape shapes our spiritual life and supports the transformation of social and ritual practices in the wake of profound destruction.

In the aftermath of WW2, large areas of Ishigaki and Iriomote islands—the largest islands in the Yaeyama archipelago—became depopulated. Entire villages, once home to vibrant social lives, were reclaimed by vegetation and almost entirely forgotten. Sacred spaces that had been venerated since the Ryukyu Kingdom period were either abandoned or continued to be revered only from afar.

These were the spaces where, dispossessed and impoverished by war, settlers from Miyako and Okinawa islands chose to rebuild their lives. Most of the first settlers were young men with newly established families or yet to have families of their own. Making their way through the jungle, they reestablished old villages and created new ones. This settlement process, a negotiation between men and nature, but also local gods and other invisible forces had a defining role in the spiritual life of these “immigrant” villages. The landscape not only played a crucial role in the reconstruction of daily lives and ritual practices, but also acted like a mnemonic agent, connecting the newly established villages to the traditional ritual practices of local people.

Mayumi TOGUCHI (Chiba University): *Reassessing Historical and Political Contexts in Public Spaces Where Japan’s Relationship is Represented: A Study of the Nikkei Community in Peru*

This research examines public spaces in Peru where Japan’s relationship is symbolically represented, such as official government events, media coverage, and educational settings. Specifically, it explores how these

spaces construct narratives about the Nikkei community to reflect broader historical and political dynamics between Japan and Peru.

By analyzing discourses in these public contexts, the study investigates how symbolic practices in such settings articulate Japan's presence and role, not only as a historical immigrant origin but also as a contemporary political and cultural actor. The research draws on linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis, utilizing data from government speeches, media reports, and public ceremonies.

This study aims to shed light on the dual function of these public spaces: as platforms for expressing Japan's influence in Peru and as sites of social negotiation, where the historical and cultural significance of migration is continuously reconstructed. It further considers how these discourses shape perceptions of the Nikkei community and contribute to the evolving socio-political relationship between the two nations.

Session 5

Ritual Practices and Daily Rituals (PANEL)

As scholars interested in Japanese society, religious traditions, and their associated rituals, the members of this panel explore the multiple (and at times overlapping) forces of change that are affecting how rituals are transmitted and received in contemporary times and what these new iterations of rituals mean for the individuals and communities associated with them.

The presentations in this panel vary geographically, covering Japan's rural peripheries to its metropolitan centers; from inland villages to coastal communities. The first paper examines the demographic crisis in a Miyagi Prefecture community and its response to the March 11 triple disaster to restore the local autumn festival. The second paper explores adaptation within Tokyo's Ōharae matsuri, showing how its modifications reflect contemporary Japan's social challenges. Finally, the last paper highlights the resilience of the Miyoshi Bonden-sai festival in Akita Prefecture and the existential challenges posed by the area's demographic decline.

Using research approaches typical of cultural anthropology, ethnography, and history, the presenters utilize a mix of methodologies to analyze the many ways in which ritual symbolism and the dynamics of rituals have changed in order to adapt to demographic, technological, and broader social challenges with which they are faced today.

Alyne DELANEY (Tohoku University): *Community Shrine Volunteerism: The Whys and Wherefores in Post-Disaster Japan*

This paper focuses on an autumn festival of the Hanabushi Shrine in Shichigahama, a town bordering Matsushima Bay in Miyagi Prefecture. In the past, the shrine was a focal point for the people of Shichigahama and the surrounding regions, particularly for those involved in fishing, trade, and maritime industries. Though relatively small, the shrine's protection of the local sea routes was vital for the safety and prosperity of local communities; in the Heian Period, the shrine was considered a *Naishin Taisha*.

The presentation centers on the role community shrine volunteers play in festival-related rituals, especially community members' views of their roles and their activities. In an area devastated by the tsunami of 3.11 (the Great East Japan Earthquake), the festival was not held for some years and has recently started up again.

In the most recent event, local volunteers took over the tasks of the religious expert, conducting purification rituals. The presentation focuses on both ethnographic details of their activities as they move a statue of a horse through town (not a mikoshi), as well as the locals' reflections on the importance of the festival for their community, and their own participation.

Given the general societal and demographic changes in Japanese coastal communities, as well as the population decline in these specific areas due to forced relocations from 3.11 related governmental policies, this case study provides a window into local residents' resilience through their willingness to adapt their activities and strategies surrounding local festivals and traditions.

Mariangela CARPINTERI (University of California, Santa Barbara): *Ōharae: Adapting a Traditional Purification Ritual*

The Ōharae is an ancient Shinto purification ritual performed twice a year, on 30th June and 31st December, in shrines across Japan. Its purpose is to cleanse the kegere accumulated over the previous six months. A key feature of the ritual is the norito, which invokes four kami to collect and expel impurities through natural elements like rivers, mountains, oceans, and wind. The role of nature is also evident in the use of the chinowa, a large grass ring set upright near the shrine's haiden, which pre-purifies visitors who pass through it.

Over centuries, the Ōharae has undergone transformations, adapting to shifts in the understanding of harae and kegere, as well as historical contexts like the integration of Chinese customs to strengthen purification practices. It also evolved during political reformations in the Meiji and Taisho periods.

In contemporary society, the ritual continues to adapt. Some shrines now emphasize the chinowa, keeping it available year-round and using larger versions for the passage of vehicles. Moreover, various shrines are adapting to welcome pets during the Ōharae, who are now regarded as family members and therefore need to be purified. Technology has been integrated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, to allow remote participation. Finally, the Ōharae is adapting also to target the new, perhaps "non-traditional" perceptions of defilement which could include the sense of sadness, depression, anxiety, and stress. Overall, I argue that by understanding how the Ōharae is adapting to meet people's needs in modern society, one can better understand broader social trends that affect people's modern lives.

Ben GRAFSTROM (University of Oslo): *Rural Rituals in Demise: Elemental Changes in Akita's Miyoshi Bonden Festival*

The Miyoshi Bonden-sai is an annual "spring" festival performed in Akita city and is said to have its origins in *shugendō* belief. Known as a "fighting" festival, participating in the event provided an opportunity for young men of the agricultural communities to put their good health and resilience on display after surviving Akita's long, harsh, snowy winters. Although the communities are no longer primarily agricultural and modern creature comforts have made it easier to survive Akita winters, the festival remains an important event for strengthening community bonds.

Akita's current demographic shift (characterized by a sustained low birthrate, an ever-increasing aging society, and rural-to-urban migration), however, may pose an insurmountable challenge to the future of

this generations-old, local, rural ritual. Since Akita's extreme demographic-changes are making it increasingly difficult to stage the festival, I ask, "Then why continue it?" What I found is that the festival continues to offer social, cultural, and political benefits to the actors and groups involved. Furthermore, as the festival is adapted to meet the challenges of societal and demographic change, new ways of benefiting from participating in the festival emerge.

Drawing on data produced through participant observation and qualitative interviews combined with analyzing text-based materials like local histories and archives, I examine the changing ritual-dynamics and subsequent benefits of the festival as organizers and participants struggle to adapt to the demographic changes around them. As for a theoretical approach, I draw on such concepts as Grimes' "ritual elements" and Humphrey and Laidlaw's notion of "ritualized action."

Session 6

Roman PAŞCA (Akita University): *"All around me are familiar faces". Crops, gravel roads, and other rituals in a small Tōhoku village*

Nashihira 梨平, a small farming village now integrated into the city of Akita, consists of only fourteen households, most of which are (or used to be until recently) involved in rice farming. Charming as it may be, the hamlet, like many other rural communities in Japan, is plagued by a plethora of issues slowly pushing it toward the status of genkai shūraku 限界集落: an aging population, abandoned houses and fields, lack of public services, a decline in government functions etc.

However, the community in Nashihira is still going strong, held together by two main factors: the shared, lived history of its members, and the various communal "rituals", old or new, that they still observe.

In my presentation, I focus on two of these "rituals": 1) a small, unofficial "harvest celebration", and 2) maintenance work on the agricultural roads shared with the neighboring hamlet. I myself take part in these "rituals" as a member of the community, so most of my data are based on direct observation and field notes. To these, I also add information I picked up from informal conversations with several members of the community, and from a life story interview with H, one of its de facto leaders. After briefly describing the "rituals", I analyze the role they play in keeping the community functional and closely knit together, and then investigate their relation with the history of the village. In lieu of a conclusion, I include my own reflections on the possible meanings of the term "ritual" in this particular context.

Hui Lok HANG (University College London): *Owned Existence: The Daily Butsudan Ritual in Rural Japan and Its Contemporary Multigenerational Relevance*

Based on twelve months of recent fieldwork in Ishikawa Prefecture, this paper examines the daily practices of the butsudan ritual in rural Japan, with a particular focus on its potential for generating new, meaningful social ties. In contrast to traditional theories, which emphasise the transient, anti-structural unity found in liminal rituals, butsudan practices are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life. Although often performed individually, these rituals transcend personal devotion by fostering an ongoing sense of indebtedness to

family ancestors. Butsudan rituals remind individuals of their goen (ご縁), the karmic connections that ties them to their predecessors, and the moral obligation they bear toward future generations. This paper presents ethnographic examples in which individuals engage in both retrospective gratitude and forward-looking actions, showing how butsudan practices guide decisions concerning family roles, community connections, and the reimagining of interpersonal relationships. In doing so, the paper questions the popular narrative in contemporary Japan that the butsudan is a declining practice, often associated with the phenomena of *hakajimai* (墓じまい) and *butsudanjimai* (仏壇じまい), the abandonment of family graves and altars. Rather than focusing solely on the decline of butsudan practices, this paper suggests reframing daily rituals performed at the butsudan as temporal practices that can create long-lasting effects. They influence decisions about personal aspirations, familial duties, and broader engagement with revitalisation of rural communities amidst rapid social and demographic changes.

Laura DALES (The University of Western Australia): *Sorokatsu as (solo) community practice in Japan*

Anthropology has long established marriage as a social, legal and economic act replete with ritual: it (variously) distinguishes the mature from the immature, the sanctioned from the illicit, the enduring from the frivolous, and the sacred from profane. By contrast, non-marriage is an unmarked state, a continuation of the pre-existing conditions, (in)capacities and social relations of the actor.

However, in a “hyper-solo society” (Arakawa 2017), the proportion of unmarried (including divorced and widowed) adult Japanese is increasing, opening possibilities for practices and ways-of-being that decentre marriage. And as Anne Allison observes, “in the disruption we see to old normativities that were always already exclusive, there is also a glimmer of something new.” (2015, 141).

This can be seen in the development and popularisation of *sorokatsu*, or “doing things alone”, a concept which has gained traction particularly since – and through – the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper, based on a collaborative research project with Dr Nora Kottmann (formerly of the DIJ, Tokyo), I trace the emergence of the trend of “doing things alone” (*sorokatsu*) and changes in its meaning and uptake. As social policies to limit the spread of the virus changed perceptions and led to a diversification and increase in solo-activities, *sorokatsu* encouraged a normalization of previously marginalized behaviour. I argue that in this way *sorokatsu* offers the possibility for a shared (albeit fraught) sense of commonality; a new form of community-making, a sociality performed alone.

Session 7

Xiaoyu ZHANG (University of Oxford): *Becoming a Shakaijin: Job-Hunting Rites and Performative Labour of International Students in Japan*

In contemporary Japan, international students play a crucial role in fostering multicultural coexistence and contributing to the nation’s development. Despite their significance, much of the existing research on this group overemphasises issues such as immigration policies, illegal overstays, and cultural maladaptation. Framed by methodological nationalism and the broader context of political and economic transformations,

these studies, while logically sound, often overlook the lived experiences of individuals and tend to depict international students as a homogenous, passive group. I believe a narrative that is grounded in individual experiences and focuses on the everyday realm is needed.

In response, this paper examines how international students negotiate Japan's visa policies and temporal rhythms during the final stages of their study abroad journeys. Drawing on six weeks of fieldwork in Tokyo, I utilised participant observation, in-depth informal interviews, and life-story narrative collection to explore the experiences of Chinese students who were nearing graduation and actively participating in job-hunting.

The paper argues that international students, includes my informants, are often placed in precarious positions, as their stays are constrained by institutional and policy-driven rhythms. However, they actively engage in performative and emotional labour, employing strategies such as internships, reciprocal behaviours, and collaboration to navigate rhythmic experiences, visa regulations and Japan's demanding job-hunting culture. By investing in performativity and embracing job-hunting rituals, they assert their agency. Far from being passive recipients of Japan's international education system, these educational migrants emerge as active participants, shaping their own trajectories.

Miwa SASAMOTO (Chiba University): *Prayer Practices of Papua New Guinean International Students Living in Japan*

From 2023 to 2024, I conducted interviews and participant observation on the daily lives of international students from Papua New Guinea living in Japan. Through this research, I observed them praying in their homes and apartments, but never in church. I realized that compared to other Christian immigrants from Southeast Asia, fewer students from Papua New Guinea attended church services.

Previous studies on Christian practices in Papua New Guinea have shown that elements of Christianity and indigenous religions are intertwined with local rituals, worship practices, and lifestyles. These studies have illuminated how local people have accepted Christianity and fused it with indigenous cosmologies. For example, Macdonald (2013) focused on the Oksapmin people, revealing that Christianity and indigenous religions are simultaneously and mutually constructed in their religious practices. Christian practices have also recently permeated Papua New Guinean public spaces, such as government meetings which open and close with prayers.

Regarding the religious practices of immigrants in Japan, it is well known that many communities bring along and adapt their home country's religious practices to the Japanese context. Nogami (2018) has, for example, shown that Vietnamese international students gather at temples built by Vietnamese immigrants. Due to perhaps their small number, natives of Papua New Guinea living in Japan have seldom attracted scholarly attention. This presentation aims to fill this gap by discussing the prayer practices of Papua New Guinean international students living in Japan.

Ieva PUZO, Aija LULLE (Rīga Stradiņš University): *Between a rock and a hard place? Making sense of workplace rituals among international scholars in Japan*

In this paper, we focus on the intersection of the ritualized aspects of everyday work life and the realities of the contemporary academic labor market in Japan's higher education and research institutions as perceived by international scholars in the country.

Over the past few decades, academic labor markets around the world have been increasingly characterized by projectification of the research process as well as the projectarization of academic labor force. Japan, despite the comparatively high overall research and development investments, has not escaped these trends either, giving rise to an increasing precarity among research workers. International scholars in Japan and early career scholars in the humanities and social science fields in particular, are especially affected by the decrease in stable academic jobs as well as the proliferation of short-term positions and non-renewable contracts.

Against this background, our paper engages with the uneasy attitudes that international scholars have towards the everyday rituals permeating their professional lives in Japanese higher education and research institutions. Our discussion is based on semi-structured interviews with international scholars in Japan, carried out online and in person over the span of 4 years (2021-2024). It highlights the multitude of emotional responses—such as irony, frustration, and apathy—through which international researchers make sense of the tension between the highly ritualized and constraining demands of their work lives and uncertain professional futures.

Session 8

Ben MOELLER (University of Oxford): *The Making of a Soldier: Negotiating Change and Tradition at Japan's Military Academy*

The Kishida administration's momentous announcement in 2022 to double Japan's defence spending and procure military capabilities previously deemed unconstitutional have shattered political precedents and undermined the persistent image of Japan as a pacifist state. At the same time, a flurry of scandals inside the country's Self-Defense Forces (SDF), ranging from high-profile cases of sexual harassment to corruption and historical revisionism have created a sense that the country's armed forces are a community that is dangerously out of touch with civilian society and has not been afforded sufficient oversight and scrutiny. Indeed, anthropologists, too, have paid little attention to the SDF, despite –or perhaps precisely because of– its contentious role in postwar Japanese society. This paper seeks to contribute an insight into this understudied organisation by answering the following question: How does the SDF teach its future leaders to think about the military's role in Japan? Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork at Japan's joint military officer academy, the first time such research has been allowed there, this paper argues that the principal socialisation students receive at the academy occurs not in academic classes and military training, but through the formalised rituals of daily life in the student barracks that constitute the academy's 'hidden curriculum'. At this moment of both rapid militarisation and increased civilian oversight, this paper

documents how students and staff of the academy are facing the complicated task of reconciling an institutional emphasis on tradition with growing demands for change as they renegotiate the value and practice of these rituals.

Eduardo GONZÁLEZ DE LA FUENTE (Kanazawa University): *Who is the busaganashi? Tutelary gods, karate, and the martial culture of Okinawa*

This presentation is dedicated to present and analyze from a cultural and historical perspective a tutelary god of karate in Okinawa. Unlike other Japanese martial arts, little attention has been paid to the presence of old religions and rituals in karate. Generally speaking, in modern times, this Okinawan martial art has been conceived of as a largely semi-secular practice, if anything, loosely connected to the mindset of broad Zen principles that permeate many facets of Japanese society. The cultural sphere of karate, however, is rife with a rich folklore nurtured by Okinawan indigenous beliefs, Buddhism and Taoism.

One of the most salient examples of the connection between karate, ritual and religion in the classical sense is the *busaganashi*, an elusive and obscure deity worshipped by several Okinawan masters since the early 20th century. Over the past few decades, this figure has become increasingly popular among karate practitioners around the world, and his image printed countless times in martial arts books, magazines, and webpages. Some karateka have even decided to buy, commission, or craft a sculpture of the *busaganashi* themselves to venerate him.

However, the origin myths and complex ritual practices historically involving the *busaganashi* remain largely unknown, also to the vast majority of practitioners in Okinawa and beyond. In this paper I will answer questions such as who tutelary god of karate really is, how he arrived in Okinawa, and what sociocultural and anthropological functions has been fulfilling for karate practitioners in recent years.

Esben PETERSEN (Kwansai Gakuin University): *Mobile Hotspots and the Transformation of Ritual Behaviour During COVID-19*

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) significantly disrupted traditional ritual practices, particularly among young Japanese individuals who suddenly found themselves unable to visit the shrines and temples they wanted to. As a response, many turned to social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, engaging in virtual worship by venerating images of temples on their mobile devices.

This talk explores the emerging concept of “mobile hotspots,” where ritualistic practices have increasingly transitioned into the digital realm. How does this shift challenge our understanding of rituals? Do we need a new framework study these evolving practices? And what can we anticipate for the future of ritual behaviour in an increasingly virtual world?

Session 9

Benjamin WOLFS (Kobe University): *The Micropolitics of Machizukuri: Its Historical Roots and Contemporary Impact in Tatsuno City*

This presentation explores the micropolitics surrounding *machizukuri* practices in Tatsuno City, Hyogo Prefecture. Specifically, I aim to examine some of the historical processes in which these micropolitics came into being, and how they continue to affect current *machizukuri* efforts.

Machizukuri has emerged as a prominent approach to revitalizing rural areas affected by demographic decline. It is closely associated with civil society as local citizens are encouraged to engage in the management and development of their communities. However, most of the existing literature on *machizukuri*, primarily from the fields of engineering, policy studies, and tourism, overlooks certain critical aspects. For instance, many studies assume that all citizens have the right to utilize local resources. In reality, their efforts are constrained by the local contexts and micropolitics at play.

To illustrate the dynamics of these micropolitics, this presentation focuses on the Tatsuno District in Tatsuno City, which has witnessed diverse *machizukuri* initiatives since the 1950s. A close examination of the history of *machizukuri* in Tatsuno district shows how these micropolitics have historically unfolded through various dimensions such as competition among stakeholders, kinship networks, unwritten norms, and past urban development efforts. The presentation will also explore how these micropolitics continue to impact contemporary practices by analyzing the experiences of current stakeholders. The insights gained from this analysis will then be included in a larger discussion of the state of civil society in rural Japan and some of the ways in which it operates.

Alejandra ROJAS BARRERA (Kyushu University): *Performing the Past: Religious and Social Rituals in Arita's Porcelain Industry*

This paper examines religious and social rituals of Arita, Saga Prefecture, as performative acts of cultural memory embedded in the community's narrative as Japan's first porcelain-producing area. For the purposes of this research, "ritual" is defined broadly to encompass not only public commemorative practices but also actions rooted in social customs. I explore how traditional Japanese practices have been appropriated and adapted to the unique characteristics of Arita's porcelain industry. Drawing on theories of cultural memory and ethnographic fieldwork, the study focuses on four case studies: 1) the wood-fired kiln practice (*makigamataki*), held at various times throughout the year; 2) the Festival for the Father of Arita Porcelain (*Tōso-sai*), celebrated annually on May 4; 3) the *Yamanobori* celebration on June 1; and 4) the *Arita Saraodori* dance, performed as part of the *Sarayama* Festival in mid-October. By emphasizing the performative aspects of these rituals, the research argues that it is through the embodied enactment of these practices that the people of Arita connect to their shared past and reinforce their communal identity. This study contributes to the understanding of how cultural memory is maintained and negotiated through the interplay of historical traditions and their contemporary expressions in daily and communal life.

Marie ULRICH (Kanazawa University): *Jinmu in Mimitsu: Japan's mythological first emperor as a constituting factor in local identity*

This paper examines how the myth of Jinmu-tennō impacts local identity and cultural memory in the village of Mimitsu, Miyazaki prefecture. Located in the south of Kyushu, Miyazaki prefecture claims to be “the homeland of mythology” (*shinwa no furusato*), as it boasts the believed locations to many Japanese myths. One of them tells the story of Japan’s mythological first emperor, Jinmu, who was supposedly born in Miyazaki and started his Eastward Expedition from there. Accordingly, several locations in Miyazaki prefecture claim a deep connection with Jinmu. One of them is Mimitsu, a sleepy port village that proudly displays its role in Jinmu’s myth: Here, Jinmu and his troops started their sea voyage, a fact that made this place quite famous in the late 1930s and 40s.

For this paper, I examine how Jinmu is connected to a town’s local identity and how banal nationalisms and social rituals throughout Mimitsu manifest and strengthen this identity on a daily basis. Using theory on collective and cultural identity construction and memory studies, I draw on observations of the Mimitsu townscape and the religious ritual *Okiyo-matsuri*, which celebrates Jinmu’s departure from Mimitsu, as well as interviews with locals. From there, I analyze how Mimitsu residents perceive their town and their relationship to and with the narrative of Jinmu-tennō, show how this plays into their self-definition, and how it is presented to the outside.

Session 10

Chiara Rita NAPOLITANO (Kyoto University): *Rituals of Domesticity: How Everyday Practices Shape Reality*

This presentation delves into the rituals of the domestic environment, offering a comprehensive perspective on how everyday practices reflect and shape broader worldviews. First, I explore the importance of focusing on the house as a microcosm of societal values and cultural systems. I define “domestic ritual” as a set of repeated actions imbued with symbolic meaning, often rooted in tradition yet adapting to contemporary contexts. The presentation argues that domestic rituals evolve as worldviews shift: some are forgotten as their symbolic roles fade, while others persist due to their enduring significance. I propose an approximate categorization of these rituals:

1. **Religious rituals**, such as household altars, *butsudan*, or practices involving shrines and the ceremonial breaking of tableware.
2. **Rituals addressing *kegare*** (ritual impurity), including practices like *morishio* (salt piles), habits related to the bathrooms, sweeping of the *zashiki*, or stepping up the *genkan* threshold.
3. **Rituals linked to *fūsui*** including the management of the *kimon* (inauspicious directions).
4. **Rituals linked to seasonal events**, including practices related to *setsubun* and other annual occurrences.

While this is a work in progress, I will primarily focus on rituals associated with *kegare* and how they reveal the intersections of purity, order, and cultural identity. I will also highlight potential future directions, including the role of the pandemic in reshaping domestic rituals.

This exploration aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how domesticity reflects dynamic cultural landscapes.

Anna-Maria STABENTHEINER (University of Vienna): *A Cultivating Mundane Rites and Shared Experiences – Creative Intervention, Social Connection, and Urban Place-Making in Kyōjima, Tokyo –*

In recent decades, the label of creativity has become an integral part of urban planning and policymaking across the globe. This trend has also found resonance in Tokyo, where large-scale city development projects, ward-level initiatives, and smaller independent effort utilize and continue to draw attention to the arts' potential to foster social cohesion, promote economic revitalization, and enhance the overall livability of urban space.

This paper examines two art events held in the Kyōjima area of Tokyo's Sumida Ward as part of the recurring *Sumida Mukōjima* EXPO (すみだ向島 EXPO), a community-oriented arts festival. Focusing on a daily five-minute violin recital and a recurring performance titled *Doro-babā* (泥ぼぼあ), I explore how these creative acts acquire ritual value through structured repetition. By utilizing public space and establishing rhythmic recurrence, these interventions introduce order into daily urban life, fostering social connections and promoting a sense of place among participants via the cultivation of shared memories and experiences.

Overall, these case studies contribute to anthropological discussions of ritual by illustrating how small-scale artistic interventions can cultivate shared rhythms and meaning in urban spaces. Through their structured repetition these practices create sites of social connection and inspire new ways of imagining local life.

Md Abdur RAHMAN (University of Central Florida): *Ritual, Mental Health, and Aging in Japan*

This study examines the consequence of ritual practices on the mental health of older adults in Japan, concentrating on diverse contexts where ritual continues to shape daily life. The research explores how different rituals contribute to emotional resilience, social integration, and a sense of purpose among aging populations in Japan by analyzing secondary sources, including ethnographic accounts, cultural histories, and prior anthropological studies. Drawing on textual analysis of qualitative works, this research synthesizes findings on the interplay between ritual and mental health within the cultural framework of Japan. The findings indicate that participation in rituals, such as various religious and non-religious ceremonies, provides older adults emotional stability and decreases feelings of isolation and anxiety. These practices support social functions and promote intergenerational connections, ensuring that older individuals feel respected, engaged, and committed within their communities. Various rituals enhance social cohesion and provide cognitive and emotional motivation, which is vital for mental well-being in old age. By highlighting rituals' cultural and symbolic significance, this research emphasizes how they act as non-clinical interventions to help mental health in aging populations. The investigation highlights the

importance of comprehending mental health through culturally embedded practices, delivering meaningful understandings of anthropological theory and empirical applications in gerontology and mental health policy. The reliance on secondary sources provides a comprehensive viewpoint, incorporating diverse ethnographic and cultural studies to understand the issue holistically.

Session 11

Florian PURKARTHOFER (University of Vienna): *The Ritualisation of Participation – or how local shared-decision-making has shifted from aspiration to routine to ritual*

Beginning in the 1960s *machizukuri* [まちづくり] - a form of participation and shared decision making (SDM) - grounded on an idealistic philosophy on local discussions about the improvement of the built environment, lifestyles, and local community where quite confrontative¹. It was an aspiration, a democratic ideal, that citizen needed to fight for and often it was a long struggle to get a seat at the table of local planning councils and to make their voice heard. During the 1980s and 90s *machizukuri* developed and became more widespread and somehow standardized. From this point on, SDM was normalized and routinely planned and carried out, not only on demand of local initiatives or individuals,

but often as top-down initiated practice of government-citizen communication. But while these development carries and optimistic notion of an open, egalitarian society and administration, that is responsive to its citizen, it also altered the once progressive practice into a planning routine, that often lost its critical claim. From the mid-2000s onwards many professionals in the field as well as citizens, witnessed (and denounced) a ritualisation of *machizukuri* as a performative act that symbolizes SDM, but channels potential critique to be defused or ignored by authorities.

Based on long term ethnographic fieldwork in Tokyo and background discussions with professional and participants alike, this paper explores the transformation of a critical functional practice into an affirmative social ritual that counteracts its initial purpose; an example for the process of overcoming critique through incorporation and perversion instead of confrontation, as seen so often in *post-sengo* Japan.

¹ Satoh, Shigeru (2020) *Japanese Machizukuri and Community Engagement: History, Method and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Luka CULIBERG (University of Ljubljana): *Green rituals: environmental practises as performative amnesia in consumerist societies and an idea of “Japanese Conceptions of nature”*

In consumerist societies, environmental rituals serve as cultural performances of concern for the environment. These generally do not contribute positively to ecological sustainability, but rather function as socially prescribed practises that allow individuals to reconcile their participation in systems of overconsumption and environmental degradation. These acts become ritualistic in nature as symbolic behaviors dictated by societal expectations. Recycling or using a reusable water bottle becomes a symbolic act of “doing your part” for the planet. Performing these rituals can create a sense of moral achievement

that leads individuals to justify other unsustainable behaviours such as frequent shopping or unnecessary consumption.

This presentation will examine rituals of environmentally friendly practises — symbolic behaviours such as recycling or using eco-friendly products — as culturally sanctioned actions that provide people in consumerist societies with a sense of environmental responsibility. In the case of Japan, these rituals seem to be underpinned by the often-invoked notions of the Japanese view of nature as a harmonious entity in which humans are inherently embedded. The question arises as to whether these ideas about supposed Japanese traditions, which view humans as part of nature rather than its masters and which supposedly symbolise the integration of human life with the natural world, do not in fact reinforce the blind spot in which environmentally damaging practises are 'greenwashed' even more than in supposedly less nature-oriented societies. This is because, contrary to the ideological notion of harmony and coexistence with nature, environmental rituals position the individual as an external actor trying to "repair" or "manage" nature. They reinforce a dichotomy rather than a unity and seem to completely lack the supposedly profound integration of the human and ecological worlds found in traditional Japanese culture.

Anne Mette FISKER-NIELSEN (Soka University): *Eating our way to ecological breakdown: ritualised conventionality of animal consumption and the maintenance of postwar Japanese patriarchy*

This paper is part of a bigger project that explores the tension between the sexual politics of meat in Japan, the wider impact of animal consumption on climate change, and groups of youth advocating equality as a praxis where people and animals are not treated as objects. Specifically, in this paper, I focus on the temporal forms that organize and disorganise relationships to the climate crisis in the context of Japanese youth groups promoting planetary sustainability. In Japan, climate solutions are typically framed as technical rather than necessitating fundamental cultural change. Animal agriculture presents the biggest threat to ecological collapse, yet there is very limited awareness and public information in Japan, a place where meat consumption has been linked intricately to salaryman masculinity, institutionalised as the very 'pillars' of Japanese societal progress. Meat consumption remains a key domain for reproducing heteronormativity, notions of 'strength' and 'desirability'. This deeply embodied, ritualised conventionality now extends to the notion of *niku joshi* - young working Japanese women whose salarywoman identity intersect with performing desirability for Japanese salarymen through animal consumption (Laukmane 2019). This paper explores how animal consumption presents a ubiquitous, highly commercialised cultural resistance to developing substantive ecological responsibility, how even amongst youth groups who engage with climate issues, discursive reproduction of conventional Japanese 'meat-based identities' tend to successfully obscure a reality of animal cruelty, death, and destruction of the natural environment. I argue that ritualised conventionality of meat consumption presents a formidable challenge to a secure future since changing eating habits challenges the very core of Japanese patriarchy.

Session 12

NAKATANI Ayami (Kwansei Gakuin University), MOTOMURA Masafumi (Okayama University), SHIMADA Yuichiro (National Institute of Technology, Oshima College): *Reluctant to be a Burden to Others: A Multidisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Approach to the Concept of "Meiwaku" and its Implications for the Japanese End of Life*

One of the most important rules in Japanese social life is not to cause inconvenience to others (*meiwaku wo kakenai*). While it is taken for granted that the Japanese are overly concerned with public manners to maintain social harmony, when did such a moral code become so widespread?

Significantly, it is said that the most desirable death for the Japanese is one that does not cause *meiwaku* for one's family, including children. Was it not part of the cherished norm that children should express their filial piety by caring for their parents in old age?

This presentation is part of the result of multidisciplinary research on the concept of *meiwaku* and its implications for the elderly people who express their wish not to be a burden to others in the last phase of their lives. Historically, the word *meiwaku* can be traced back to the late Meiji period, when it began to be included in moral instruction textbooks to teach the importance of socially minded behaviours. What is noteworthy in contemporary Japan is that the use of *meiwaku* has been extended to include the burden of caring for the elderly, even within the family.

In the Netherlands, where bothering others in public scenes is much less controversial than in Japan, the desired sense of not being a burden is increasingly recognized in the context of ageing and the ultimate choice of euthanasia.

Our aim, therefore, is to situate the widespread sentiments among the Japanese elderly in a framework of comparison across time and place to explore both the specificity and the commonality of such emotional expressions.

Sayako ONO (University of Tokyo): *Ritualised Approaches to Sexual Harassment Regulations in Japanese Universities*

Following the implementation of Japan's new sex education guidelines (2021) and the amended penal code for sexual offences (2023), the MEXT (2023) notified universities of the need to promote efforts to prevent sexual violence. However, as of November 2024, only about one-third of national universities had updated their guidelines to include the term "sexual violence" (Japan Association of National Universities n.d.).

In my survey and interviews with selected national universities, when officials were asked why they had not included the term in their harassment regulations, many replied with performative ritual responses (Schechner 1985). They explained that sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence, so their harassment policies could be interpreted to include sexual violence in a broader sense, based on the definition of sexual violence found in the Gender Equality Bureau (2023). However, MEXT (2023) clearly informed the universities that they should define sexual violence separately from sexual harassment because the term "sexual harassment" somewhat omits the serious case of criminal offence in the Japanese context.

With this in mind, this presentation will examine why some national universities have ritualistically avoided complying with the government's directive to include "sexual violence" in their regulations. While some universities can be interpreted as being in a liminal period (Turner 1967), with an aim of eventually including sexual violence in their regulations, others are reluctant to change their regulations, due to concerns for university autonomy against state intervention.

Debra OCCHI, Nanami MOMIKI (Miyazaki International University): *The Role of Ritual Practices in Creating an English Day Camp in Aya Miyazaki*

Aya's 2024 English Day program was based on various established practices including those related to English education (which in Japanese contexts is based on standardized textbooks) and innovative local education as well. Aya, Miyazaki in southern Kyushu, has a UNESCO-recognized broadleaf evergreen forest, and practices organic agriculture. Aya's Eco Park collaborates with Aya schools to facilitate understanding of Aya among local students during the integrated study sessions (相互的な学習の時間), a pedagogy commonly referred to as Aya-gaku (Aya studies). Thanks to our town-gown relationship, we were able to study and witness Aya-gaku sessions taught in Japanese. The ritual frame for this knowledge relied on the students' English language levels and appropriate grammar formulae. The learning materials included a series of conversational rituals expressing pedagogy about the town in English. These included grammar review, student practice, the Japanese game of karuta, gap fill exercises, creation and performance of short skits in homage to the town and its attractions. Combining everyday ritual conversational frameworks with familiar contents created a novel experience while maintaining a level of comfort necessary for middle school students to use English, a practice ideologically fraught and stressful for many Japanese. These familiar rituals with local contents allowed successful outcomes for all and provided not only a potential legacy for Aya but a template for similar events.

Session 13

Takumi FUKAYA (Kyoto University): *Italian Wines and Tuscany in the Japanese Wine Industry: A Case Study on Literature and Senses of Wine Production Regions over the Past 20 Years*

This presentation explores the images of Italy, particularly Tuscany, as a wine production region, as reflected in publications on Italian wine in Japan.

The wine consuming culture was introduced to Japan in the 1970s as a symbol of social high-class status. Later, during the 1990s, the popularity of manga about wine and the international success of Japanese sommeliers brought further attention to wine culture. At that time, France was prominently positioned as the foremost "prestigious wine region."

Compared to France, Italy's emergence as a major "prestigious wine region" in Japan occurred relatively recently. Italian cuisine and its wine in Japan gained attention during the so-called *Itameshi boom* of during the bubble economy era in the 80s and the 90s. Along with this trend, literature on Italian wine also has been began to increase gradually.

This presentation examines the publications that give the basic information on the Italian wine in the textbook published by the Japan Sommelier Association, analyzing them by the publication years and by the authors. Through this analysis, it tracks how Italy has been evaluated or imagined in Japan, highlighting historical changes over the past 20 years.

Focusing on Tuscany, renowned for labels such as Chianti, the sensory evaluation of the Sangiovese grape has become more specific and standardized over time. Furthermore, differences are evident in the portrayal of the Tuscan culinary culture.

In this way, literature and perceptions surrounding food are shown to be interconnected with nationalism and symbol through imagination.

Anemone PLATZ (Aarhus University): *Imaginaries of Japanese sustainability practices in Denmark*

In many ways societies have arrived at a turning point in history, when it has become a must to rethink habits and find more sustainable ways of living than the current generations are used to. While looking into innovative trends and futuristic advancement is on politico-economic agendas, looking back to rediscover meaningful hints in past and traditional ways of living are often perceived as outdated and discarded as viable trendsetting initiatives. Japan is no exception in this current scenario of industrialized countries. While having a plethora of traditional ways of living and production in a sustainable manner, little attention is given to them but from some groups of people in search for other forms of living, usually living unperceived on the peripheries of mainstream society.

With Denmark as case, this paper analyses, how and why Japan has become a source of knowledge and inspiration for a variety of small and medium size enterprises to produce environmentally friendly and sustainable products. Based on interviews and analysis of home pages, some of the imaginaries about Japan are unraveled while at the same time searching for reasons for why these largely ignored and disqualified qualities in Japan itself, show the power to gather both producing and consuming followers elsewhere.

Chloe PABERZ (IFRAE, Inalco, Paris): *Individualized rituals: The case of mangakas' routines*

This paper focuses on the ritual dimension of the work of mangakas (illustrators). It will explore how the notion of ritual might be useful in understanding the specificities of work in the contemporary 'creative' industries of manga, anime and video games.

Based on ethnographic data collected in South Korea and Japan, I will show that the numerous mangakas involved in these industries develop work processes and rituals that remain free of any standardization, even if the outcome of their work is highly standardized in order to fit into a collective production.

Looking at their professional training in manga classes, the physical techniques of mangakas seem to remain beyond the reach of teachers, whose guidance tends to focus on results. This relative freedom contrasts with other forms of artistic training, such as music or crafts, where students' bodies are constantly guided to achieve a certain level of mastery before individual expression can develop. In manga schools, on the other hand, the mangakas' physical techniques remain extremely diverse and free, even if the tools are identical.

I would like to suggest that mangakas might be encouraged to develop individual routines for specific reasons that might be better understood by examining their ritual dimension as a "symbolic social technique" (Chiva ¹) used to win over forces beyond one's control (Cazeneuve ²). We will try to identify the symbolic effects, beliefs and ideals associated with individually routinised postures and gestures in a context of great uncertainty.

¹ Chiva, « Aujourd'hui les rites de passage », in Centlivres et Hainard, *Les Rites de passage aujourd'hui : actes du Colloque de Neuchâtel*, 1981, Lausanne, Éditions L'âge d'homme, 1986.

² Cazeneuve, *Sociologie du rite*, PUF, 1971.

Session 14

Reflecting and Revisiting 「Teaching Japan」 (PANEL)

Teaching Japan: A Handbook (Gaitanidis and Poole 2024) was launched and introduced at the Anthropology of Japan in Japan 2023 Annual Meeting. In their opening chapter, co-editors Gaitanidis and Poole discussed the logic behind the book, "...despite the rich history of critical discussion around 'researching Japan,' there is not yet a comprehensive guide for taking these scholarly debates into the undergraduate, and (often) non-Japanese Studies, classroom. This then was the impetus for this forthcoming interdisciplinary collection of pedagogical case studies..." The book launch was a year and a half ago, and the book chapters were written long before that. This panel strives to continue the discussion that *Teaching Japan* began through a revisit of our chapters, to rethink, reflect, self-criticize and/or build upon our original ideas. In his presentation, McMorran asks critical questions about ethnographies in/about Japan to further explore the validity and value of collaborative ethnographic research beyond the borders of Japan. Fassbender rethinks teaching methods and approaches to counteract the influence of social media that limits students in their understanding of complicated and multifaceted issues surrounding gender and reproductive politics. McGuire reassesses teaching methods and approaches to explore the complexities of social inequality through intersectionality and reflects on the inclusion of literature that looks beyond Japanese society. Fedorowicz revisits the potential for a more active student learning environment and further course development amidst the current multimodal turn in and outside the classroom to make a new version of his course. Discussion and feedback are especially encouraged.

Chris MCMORRAN (National University of Singapore): *Japan All Around: Teaching about Japanese Society in Singapore*

In my chapter in *Teaching Japan: A Handbook*, I discussed disciplinary shifts in anthropology toward studies that are multi-sited and unbounded by national borders. Despite admitting the importance of such geographically promiscuous research, however, I shared my rather conservative approach to teaching about Japan through ethnography, specifically ethnographies based in Japan. I concluded my chapter by asking about the risks and potential rewards of using ethnography to move beyond a Japan-centered

understanding of Japanese society. In this presentation, I introduce an ongoing pedagogical effort to answer this question. I outline a course I teach in Singapore that includes students in qualitative research among Japanese citizens residing in the small city-state. Despite its dry title, “Japanese Political Economy” approaches the subject from a distinctly human angle, by focusing on the ways Japan’s political economy has impacted the work lives and family lives of Japanese citizens residing in Singapore. In my presentation, I share the course aims, the research assignment, and the insights gained from several years of teaching the course. What have students learned about Japan and Japanese society by examining the work lives and family lives of those who reside outside its borders? Finally, despite their physical distance from Japan, how can students be inspired by anthropology to see, and investigate, Japan all around them?

Isabel FASSBENDER (Kansai Gaidai University): *How to Unlearn Reproductive Politics in the Classroom*

Building on my chapter, *Teaching Gender and the Politics of Reproduction in Japan: Self-Government as a Theoretical Reference Point*, recent experiences and observations in a course offered to mostly one-semester foreign exchange students inform this presentation about challenges and opportunities in teaching reproductive politics in university. It discusses classroom strategies to create a space to learn about reproductive politics in Japan and at the same time consider biomedical ethical questions detached from social ideologies or political partisanship for students that come from a background where these issues are often highly politicized. Contents of the course focus on historical circumstances and contemporary debates surrounding population control and reproduction in Japan (including pregnancy, birth, reproductive technologies, and contraception). However, as a matter of course, ideological and political frameworks that shape current debates in Western contexts often circumscribe the scope within which students access legal and ethical questions surrounding these issues. Not rarely in today’s media landscape, opinions are significantly conditioned through social media channels, which can be simplified and/or biased. It is thus crucial to provide students with opportunities to unlearn or question their preconceptions along with factual knowledge. Teaching methods that emphasize particular historical, socio-political, and cultural circumstances in Japan, as well as presenting diverse viewpoints and theories beyond neoliberal and capitalist approaches that automatically equate developments in science and technology with moral and ethical progress, have proven to be effective in broadening the scope of possible class debates in the context of reproductive politics.

Jennifer M. MCGUIRE (Doshisha University): *How (un)equal is Japanese Society: Thinking with Intersectionality in the Classroom*

Understanding inequality in Japan requires moving beyond single-axis frameworks. To fully grasp the causes and consequences of social inequalities, we need tools that delve into the complexity of oppression and power. In this presentation, I discuss how I use intersectionality as a provisional concept and analytical tool in an advanced level course in an English-taught program at a Japanese university. I argue that despite significant obstacles to its use in a university course, including a relative lack of English-language sources

about Japan, it is crucial to view and interpret Japanese society through an intersectional lens to challenge assumptions and develop a more nuanced understanding of social inequalities. I analyze data collected in the classroom, particularly class discussions and students' written responses, focusing on how gender intersects with class and disability to produce inequalities and discrimination. Additionally, I examine the need for heightened sensitivity and awareness when teaching in a multidisciplinary, multilingual setting where students' positionalities and subjectivities can result in particularly complex relationships to Japan. While I argue that intersectionality helps us move beyond stereotypical and superficial understandings of marginalized social groups, I also reflect on the significant challenges of applying a framework that originated in Black feminism in the United States to a society with a vastly different sociopolitical and historical context.

Steven C. FEDOROWICZ (Kansai Gaidai University): *The Visual Anthropology of Japan: In and Outside the Classroom, Revisited*

My chapter describes teaching a class comprised of international exchange students from many different countries alongside local students preparing for their study-abroad programs called “Visual Anthropology of Japan” at a Japanese university from 2006 to 2014. Topically, the course was about the presentation and representation of culture through film, photography, and other visual communication arts within the shifting anthropological ecologies of media, methods, and theory. Teaching “Japan” in this context required several balances of instruction and guidance for students of different academic levels, backgrounds, language skills and expectations studying together in the same class. Because of my training and background in cultural anthropology and visual anthropology, I do not consider my text as a theoretical treatise on pedagogy per se. Rather it is closer to an ethnographic—sometimes autoethnographic—account based on the fieldwork of teaching this course under certain conditions at a global educational setting. In my presentation, I will revisit this setting through the reflexive lens of *ba* (Kajimaru, Coker and Kazuma 2021), specifically, the convergence of players, place and performance during the period of the multimodal turn in visual anthropology that coincided with the class. This reminiscent revisit reaffirms the potential and possibility for a more active student learning environment and further course development to make a new and improved version of the course.

Session 15

Raluca Maria CIOLCA (Osaka University): *Ritual and Language: Is Linguistic Expression a Reflection or a Driving Force of Social Practice?*

This presentation explores the relationship between discourse and practices related to covering one's face in the Japanese context. Specifically, the discussion will focus on vocabulary items such as *masuku bijin* (literally translated as ‘mask beauty’ in English), which started to gain remarkable popularity in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are still present in everyday discourse.

The ritualistic aspects of mask-wearing in the context of the pandemic have been brought up in a variety of studies from different domains, with most such studies at least touching upon the relationship between mask-wearing and health benefits. On the other hand, turning the lens on linguistic expression in Japanese suggests that putting on a mask has also evolved into a type of ritual practice mainly serving an esthetic purpose, that of hiding a part of one's face perceived as not attractive enough.

The presentation will investigate the multi-faceted relationship between language and social practice, focusing on topics such as gender, self-image, and conventional ideas of beauty in Japan. The main question that the presentation strives to offer an answer to is whether linguistic choice has the power to influence the general perception, be it positive or negative, on habits related to covering one's face, especially when these habits are not motivated by health concerns.

Incoronata Nadia INSERRA (University of Tokyo): *Changing Ritual Practices in Manazuru's Kibune Matsuri: Women and Outsiders' Roles in Sustaining Local Traditions*

This paper explores the notion of ritual within the larger framework of shinto festival practices; in particular, it discusses ways that shinto festival rituals are changing due to societal pressures—namely, population decline and the lack of successors in traditional practices. Based on fieldwork research in the Manazuru Peninsula of Japan's Sagami Bay, this paper examines the current status of Manazuru's Kibune Matsuri—one of the three biggest boat festivals in Japan. Since 2020, festival organizers have dealt with several challenges—from pandemic lockdown to lack of manpower necessary for sustaining the festival. These challenges have not only made evident that the festival is at risk of surviving, but also ultimately led to local innovation and regional collaboration—such as recruiting volunteers from neighboring towns and even allowing gaijins to participate in kaidenma rowing teams. More importantly, women have been increasingly active in the mikoshi parade, even if they are still not allowed on the festival boats. I argue that this kind of innovation is important, in that it re-conceptualizes the very notions of “ritual” and of “tradition.” Moreover, these current changes—albeit limited and even contradictory—have the potential to cause bigger changes to the social structure of the community in the long run.

Session 16

Mayo SUZUKI (Chiba University): *Influencer-centred collective action on social networking sites: Spirituality from the perspective of online affordance*

This study examines the interaction and community formation between followers of astrologist influencers on social networking sites. Texts published by influencers, and their online and offline live events, form points of connection and collective action for a significant number of people who consider themselves part of the same community, called in this case-study *kaiwai* (lit. the neighbourhood). Members of this “neighbourhood” interact on the live feeds of online events and, encouraged by these astrologist-influencers, write their impressions online to connect to other members of the same community. Although this phenomenon could be understood as “pop spirituality” (Horie 2019), I argue in this paper that there

are aspects of these interactions of “digital spirituality” that cannot be adequately explained by conventional anthropological theories of religious organization or religious networks.

In the anthropology of religion in Japan, research on contemporary spirituality has concentrated on practices occurring in places already described as “religious,” and otherwise claimed to be “power spots,” such as shrines, temples and other sacred sites. In contrast, this paper attempts to analyze online spiritual practices from the perspective of SNS studies, particularly by employing the concept of affordance. More specifically, I analyze how the technical limitations of social media seem to promote kinds of interaction that the followers of astrologists interpret and use to strengthen their sense of community. In this way, *kaiwai* can be understood as networks formed in interaction with the characteristics and ideologies of social media platforms.

Mattias van OMMEN (Doshisha University): *Rituals of Empathy: Emotional Expression, Ludic Action, and Social Belonging in Japanese Online Games*

As digital games evolve in technical complexity, online connectivity, and visual depth, they increasingly serve as spaces for emotional expression and the formation of rich social communities. This trend is particularly significant in Japan, where self-expression is highly contextual and often mediated through established forms of interaction. Drawing on long-term participant observation that combines in-person and in-game fieldwork, this presentation focuses on players of *Final Fantasy XIV* (FFXIV), a popular Japanese online role-playing game. I explore how ritualized patterns of play and interaction create subjunctive, “as if” spaces where players can transcend everyday social constraints. While creating an alternative world with its own rules and limitations, players also cross such boundaries by: 1. drawing from physical world behavioral norms in organizing their communities; and 2. developing relationships that eventually come to transcend the virtual world frame, into the offline world.

Yet, as this study shows, before relationships can transcend the virtual world, players must first engage in ritualized acts in-game: the systematic expression of *amae* (dependency needs) and empathy, encompassing both *kyōkan* (co-feeling) and *omoiyari* (pro-social action). Concretely, I analyze the patterned ways in which players express emotions in-game, how such expressions elicit empathetic responses within the game-world framework, and how such engagements help foster lasting social bonds and communities. Unlike the offline world, where social behavior and relationships are restricted by markers like gender, occupation, and education, these gaming communities thus enable the formation of long-term *ibasho* (spaces of belonging) that foster intimate connections across various social boundaries.

Björn-Ole KAMM (Kyoto University): *Improvised Rituals in Live-Action Role-Playing Games (Larps) in Japan*

This talk explores improvised rituals within live-action role-playing games (larps) in Japan, focusing on how participants adapt and create ritualistic practices within the “magic circle” of a larp’s time-space. Examining sword-and-sorcery, jidaigeki (period drama), and science-fiction larps, this research highlights the creative interplay between fictional settings and primary-world cultural elements.

Examples include magic rites and spell-casting in fantasy larps, pseudo-religious rituals performed by onmyōji in jidaigeki larps, and otherworldly rites of passage in science-fiction larps designed for educational purposes. These rituals, often collaboratively devised, draw from imagined traditional Japanese ritual practices while incorporating the imaginative flexibility of larp.

The talk addresses key questions about the relationship between primary-world rituals and their in-game counterparts. To what extent do participants mirror “authentic” ritual structures within the bounded time-space of larp? How are improvised rituals negotiated and executed collaboratively by players? What functions do these rituals serve within larp communities—cultural immersion, character development, group bonding, or exploring liminal and transformative experiences?

Drawing on comparative studies of ritual improvisation in larps, this presentation situates Japanese larp practices within a broader global context. By analysing these performances as both playful and meaningful acts, this talk offers insights into the ways improvised rituals function as a cultural bridge, enabling participants to explore culture, spirituality, and communal engagement in a uniquely performative medium.

Session 17

Heike HOFFER (Independent Researcher): *Dandadan, Fernando Sor, and Intertextual Ritual*

Anime has long been recognized for its seemingly ritualistic use of intertextual references that occupy varying levels of obscurity. Some are easy for almost anyone to identify, while others are intended for an all-knowing in-crowd. The anime *Dandadan* from 2024 has proven to be a goldmine of these intertextual allusions, drawing equally from contemporary resources and decades-old materials. These aspects converge in the fifth episode of *Dandadan*, which features a charming scene depicting a budding high-school romance set to Fernando Sor’s *Introduction and Variations on a Theme by Mozart*, Opus 9. This piece has been used as a sonic marker of romance in Japanese media as far back as the 1960s with the award-winning film *Koto* and the popular supernatural drama *Kaiki-daisakusen*, but also in more recent examples such as the second *Rebuild of Evangelion* film. Following scholars Gorbman and Godsall in their work on the relationship between meaning-making and pre-existing music in film, this presentation establishes Sor’s position as a composer in modern Japanese musical society and unravels some of the intertextual web built around his Opus 9 with *Dandadan* as its center point. Next, by drawing on Levine’s writing on the establishment of cultural hierarchies, this presentation evaluates responses to the use of Sor’s Opus 9 in *Dandadan* by Japanese classical guitarists, who expressed genuine excitement to communicate the historical significance of the piece to a wider audience mixed with a sense of protectiveness over the piece’s ritualized legacy as an elite canonical work in the classical guitar repertoire.

Celia SPODEN (German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo): *Avatar Robots as an Alter Ego: New Opportunities for Work or Technological Fixes?*

In the DAWN Avatar Robot Café, located in Tokyo's Nihonbashi district, people who have difficulties leaving their homes – the majority with disabilities – remotely control an avatar robot called OriHime. The robot acts as their alter ego, enabling them to serve customers at the café from their homes or sometimes from a hospital room. Approximately 70 individuals scattered throughout Japan work remotely in the café. Drawing on fieldwork in the café and interviews with the avatar pilots, I explore what it means when avatar robots become a second body in the physical world and mediate social interaction. By presenting my interlocutor's perceptions of social participation, work, and disability, I show how the avatar opens up new opportunities, leads to a feeling of independence and belonging, helps to regain or adopt a positive attitude towards the future, and challenges common understandings of "disability." Moreover, I contextualize these avatar technologies within the Japanese government's science and technology research and development strategy – such as the concept of a super smart society (Society 5.0) and the "Moonshot Research and Development Program" – and ask what it means when these technologies become technological fixes to social problems, which remain untouched by welfare policies.

Barbara HOLTHUS (German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo): *Pet hatsumōde: Between business and enchantment*

Since 2022, the annual number of pets brought into families has superseded that of children being born in Japan. Surveys show that the majority of pet owners considers their pets as family members. So it is probably not surprising that pet owners include their furry family members in their leisure time activities and important family outings, including visits to shrines and temples. This presentation focuses specifically on the ritual of the first annual shrine or temple visit of a new year, the so-called *hatsumōde*. Some shrines and temples have started holding specific pet-blessing events. We conducted participant observation at several such events, informally talked to pet owners, distributed a small survey among participating pet owners, and interviewed an overseeing priest. We argue that rituals (inherently a human endeavor) such as *hatsumōde* have now become inclusive, but not to the degree that the distinction between human and non-human animals has really started to blur. Aware that there is a segment of the population that can be termed "anti-pet", shrines and temples are managing the fine line between inclusion of non-human animals as well as not bothering those that would be put off by pets. Dressing your pet in fancy clothes for the *hatsumōde*, buying the participation in the rite itself, plus the obligatory purchase of *omamori* charms is also a lucrative business, as is the entire pet economy. And shrines and temples know how to tap into the pet market, from blessings to funerals.

Day 3 April 6

Session 18

Wolfram MANZENREITER (University of Vienna): *Ceremonial rigidity and organizational flexibility in a rural community ritual*

In Japanese folklore tradition, shrine festivals are integral for expressing the bonds and relations of a rural community and its members with nature and the kami. They consist of different layers of symbolism enacted in ritualist practice and performances that relate to other festivals of the agricultural life cycle and ritualised practice form of community institutions. The festival this presentation is concerned with is part of the agricultural ceremonial heritage of Aso, a region in central Kyushu my research team from Vienna has been engaged with for nearly a decade. I will explain meaning and significance of ritual practice at the Onda Matsuri, which has been acknowledged as Intangible Cultural Property and attracts many visitors from outside the region to the midsummer festival. I argue that under the ongoing threats of rural depopulation the continuation of the festival is of utmost significance for maintaining hope and community embeddedness among its participants. Both rigidity in ceremonial protocol as well as flexibility in organizational and practical aspects of the rituals are required to sustain the festival and a sense of community.

Andhika WIJAYA (Tohoku University): *When Agritourism became a Ritual: The Case of Inakadate Village, Aomori Prefecture*

In Japan, the collapse of the bubble economy affected the mass tourism industry, leading to the emergence of local-based and sustainable alternative tourism, with agritourism emerging as one of the strategies for the revitalization of declining rural areas. Agritourism often leverages the seasonal cycles of nature and agricultural production, which influences the ritualization of tourism activities as a yearly event and contributes to shaping the localities and sense of place of the region. As a result, agritourism can be seen as a ritual through which the host region highlights its local charm, circulates its narratives to audiences and the media, and aims to attract more visitors to explore the area and engage in local consumption activities. Additionally, an art-based approach or creative expression is also often considered as a potential way to enhance tourism activities, particularly in regions with limited tourism resources. This study explores the role of ritualized agritourism in shaping municipal representation by examining the intersection of agricultural education, local cultural narratives, and art-related activities within tourism development. The author conducted the research through archival studies and field observation, focusing on the development of rice paddy art in Inakadate Village, Aomori Prefecture. The case study demonstrates how the integration of art-related activities along with the incorporation of local cultural narratives in seasonal and exhibition-based agritourism establishes it as a secular ritual that serves not only direct economic purposes but also social and political functions.

Yuki NISSATO (Kobe University): *Shochu and Ritual Practices: Ethnographic Fragments from A Hamlet in Southern Kyushu*

This presentation reports on the relationship between Shochu and various religious and non-religious ritual practices in a hamlet in Southern Kyushu.

In brief, Shochu is a type of Japanese Sake that is produced using three key components: (1) Koji mold, (2) Multiple parallel fermentation, and (3) Distillation. It is typically made in the warmer regions of Japan, such as Kyushu and Okinawa, and a variety of ingredients are used, such as sweet potatoes, rice, and barley depending on the region.

Shochu plays a significant role in ritual life in the rural hamlets of the Kagoshima Prefecture. While the practice of "drinking" alcohol is a common focus in alcohol studies, this presentation emphasizes the acts of "giving" or "offering" shochu within the context of several local rituals.

Through these examples, this report illustrates how Shochu is intricately linked to the local community. As exploration of the social and cultural aspects of Japanese Sake has become increasingly relevant, especially following UNESCO's addition of 'Traditional Knowledge and Skills of Sake-making with Koji Mold in Japan' to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list in December 2024, Japanese Sake industries anticipate an increase in exports and a growing interest in the topic in the following years.

This presentation aims to contribute to this dialogue by highlighting the vital yet often-overlooked role of shochu in ritual activities.

Session 19

Millie CREIGHTON (University of British Columbia): *The Way of Tea as Ritual of Rationality and Reflection of Japanese Culture*

Chado, the Japanese Way of Tea, also known as *chanoyu*, hot water for tea, and—sometimes more contentiously--the Japanese Tea Ceremony has been erroneously considered “empty ritual,” involving formal procedures with no particular importance except to complicate tea making (see White, 2012, *Coffee Life in Japan*). This presentation shows the Japanese Tea Ceremony, with its many movements and procedures that vary with each *temae* (specific preparations of sweets and tea for guests) and also by season, as absolutely rational, with each movement constituting an essential act that must be done and done at the correct timing for the tea to reach maximum flavor and the engagement to proceed without hindrance. This presentation shows that the seemingly complex nature of tea ritualization also reflects embedded concepts of Japanese culture. Tea is explored as both a highly logical practice and as manifesting Bourdieu's concept of the logic of practice. *Chado* is an art practice engaging a host as performer and guests as audience members who are also part of the performance, that emphasizes the ties and connectedness among those involved. The rituals of *chado* constitute a sort of discourse, which once entered into require each precise movement. It is a discourse that reflects Japanese cultural discourse, and the presentation contends that as such, in each case, once the tenets of the discourse have been accepted and entered into, what follows is

ritualization of rationality with all elements fitting together, forming a logic of practice for special involvements as in daily life.

Liliana MORAIS (Specially Appointed Professor, Department of Contemporary Culture, College of Sociology, Rikkyo University): *The contemporary allure of wood-firing: from an East Asian to a transnational post-modern ritual practice*

The firing of ceramics at high temperatures of at least 1200 Celsius dates back to 1400 BCE in China and 400 CE in Japan and was not widely practiced outside East Asia until the eighteenth century. Despite the development of more efficient kilns fueled by gas and electricity over the past two centuries, the wood-firing of ceramics at high temperatures has expanded worldwide since the 1960s, accompanying the growth of Japan's *soft power*. As a result, Japanese-style kilns such as *anagama* and *noborigama*, which originated in the fifth and sixteenth centuries, can now be found across almost all continents.

After tracing the circulation of high-temperature wood-firing from Japan to the West, we examine its contemporary allure by looking at this transnational practice as a secular ritual, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with non-Japanese practitioners across Japan, Portugal, and Brazil. Understanding ritual as a sequence of actions that marks the transition from one state to the other – in the case of wood-firing – the transformation of clay into pottery, we will examine the specific steps involved in the process usually spanning 24 to 96 hours. By involving the collaboration of diverse groups of people as well as interactions with non-human agents, contemporary wood-firing not only fosters human and more-than-human communities of practice but also reveals wider human aspirations and anxieties about modernity with drive for efficiency and rationality.

Session 20

Ioannis GAITANIDIS (Chiba University): *Fraud and Consumer Choice in Early Postwar Japan: A Pre-History of the “Spiritual Sales”*

When the issue of “spiritual sales” (*reikan shōhō*) attracted media attention in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, specialists rushed to remind audiences that this has been a decades-old issue, dating back to the mid-1980s. Subsequently, several publications have analysed at length the history of the phenomenon, often giving the false impression that this consumer issue arose out of nowhere. In this presentation, I offer an account of the pre-history of “spiritual sales” by looking at the development of consumer fraud cases in the early postwar period, and especially complaints surrounding multi-level marketing (*maruchi shōhō*) companies. My focus here will be on the processes by which these cases led to legislative efforts to prevent such issues for the first time in Japanese legal history. A landmark event was the prosecution of the cosmetics company Holiday Magic in the mid-1970s for infringing the anti-monopoly law. I will argue that this marked a new way of thinking about consumer behaviour and the manipulation of consumers' emotions for profit. Occurring in the middle of an era of rising criticism

against the ills of capitalism and over-consumption, moral imperatives regarding the protection of consumers became confounded with business ideals regarding client-seller trust relationships. The result was regulations that had mixed results and which sought to prevent the worst at the expense of minor frauds. The rest is, of course, history.

Maria Ibari ORTEGA (Australian National University): *Performing Plasticity: Sensations and cultural haptics in a local ritual festival in Japan*

In this presentation, I will introduce the concept of Performative Plasticity in Heritage practices I have elaborated during my doctoral research. I depart from my interpretation of the concept of plasticity, defined by Tom Sparrow as "the materiality of sensation", to focus on its role in fostering resonance and permeability—intercorporeal and inter-affective—among local parishioners. Both qualities, resonance and permeability, are key in cultivating moral moods and ethical subjectivities, in the particular the case study of the Hadaka Matsuri of Mitsuke District, In Shizuoka Prefecture, researched during fieldwork between 2015 and 2017.

Such performative plasticity, as experienced in ritual interactions, is informed by and transmitted by the local specificities of what I call Cultural Haptics. I define it as the tactile, kinesthetic, aura—and sonic—multi-sensory modalities that are set in motion and activated in cultural performances. Here, the tactile must not be reduced to corporeal proximity, for it also includes the tactility of atmospheric and liquid bodies (e.g. the ocean) and the sonic and kinesthetic tactility produced by resonating objects. In particular the sonic performativity of sacred bells (*suzu*), used in different ritual events.

On the one hand, I offer an alternative approach to sensational practices, by introducing a definition of sensation as plasticity (Sparrow, 2015), decentered from the perceiving subject and the human body, to locate sensation in the textures of the in-between body and world, from which the body takes its mutable forms. And on the other hand, I am proposing to consider an anthropological approach to moral life and ethics beyond the prescription of pre-existing values, rules or norms associated to Japanese culture or behaviour, to conceive ritual practices more as open virtual fields for moral experimentation (Mattingly, 2014) and moral breakdowns (Zigon, 2007) through which people can understand and explore their individual and collective efforts to establish strong life-long social bonds not only with the celebrated Shinto deities, but with their own community and with themselves. This allows me to shed light on the energetic and corporeal investment parishioners experience in their quest for self-transformation and self-discovery through ritual interaction.

Guilherme FIGUEIREDO (University of Oxford): *Onisube: Ritual, Community, and Art Beyond Aesthetics*

This paper examines ritual through phenomenological perspectives of art. Connections between ritual and art have been noted by many scholars (Dewey 1934; Harrison 1913; Schechner 1993; Turner 1995). However, when understood from the perspective of aesthetics, art and ritual can stand in relations of opposition. Rituals are typically characterized by their communal, formal, and repetitive nature, while art

is frequently rooted in creativity, associated with subjectivity, the cult of individuality (Millen 2010; Saint-Amour 2003), and the dissolution, rupture, or reformation of established traditions, social institutions, and cultural patterns (Rosaldo, Smadar, & Narayan 1993: 5).

Drawing on my recent fieldwork in Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine (Fukuoka Prefecture), I take *Onisube Ritual* (鬼すべ神事) as an ethnographic case study and argue that this ritual festival (*matsuri* 祭り) can be understood as a ‘work of art.’ As such, the Japanese *matsuri*, and the *Onisube* in particular, can be elucidated by reference to theories of art that are critical of aesthetics and thus not predicated on subjectivist and anti-traditional ideals. As a communal ritual, *Onisube* demands the abandonment of subjectivity and dilution of the subject (*mushin* 無心) for the communal efforts, and the ‘pouring’ of bodies (Pilgrim 1989) into the prescribed ritual forms, binding the community synchronically and diachronically. However, far from being a crystallised practice, through detailed analysis of its preparation, performance, and symbolic operations, I reveal how this *matsuri* opens fertile spaces of interpretative possibilities that are sensitive to historical change and can adapt and correspond to contemporary issues and concerns.

By “undergoing” (Ingold 2014) the processes of preparation and participation in this ancient sacred ritual, communal and historical forms of meaning are cyclically disclosed and continually brought into being. Through participation and the enactment of its dramatic structure, *Onisube*, much like a work of art, is *an event in understanding* (Gadamer 2013) insofar as it addresses existential concerns, connects generations, and discloses and provides the local community with a sense of itself in the present and over time.

Session 21

Rituals and the (Re)making of Space: Discourse, Identity, Performance and their Spaces (PANEL)

Victor Turner’s seminal *Forest of Symbols* (1967) proposes rituals as key sites of social reproduction due to their public dissemination of the terms for social solidarity and also because rituals set forth liminal spaces wherein the transgression of social mores and roles are held apart from everyday life. From bento boxes (Occhi, 2016) to gift-giving (Rupp, 2003) and weddings (Edwards, 1989), rituals have offered anthropologists of Japan a means to grasp a dialectical tension between agency and structure in the multi-sited, durational reproduction of social identities and solidarities. But while ritual space may exist in folk models as delimited and stipulated, as Koike’s paper for this panel on *machitzukuri* demonstrates, the negotiation of space does not simply limit or stipulate the bounds of a ritual but also remakes ritual participants and practices.

The papers on this panel collectively explore the discourses, representations, and questions that participants in contemporary Japanese rituals – from routinized acts of consumption to religious rites – develop about their participation in these rituals through engagements with specific (ritual) spaces. Building upon prior ethnographic conceptualizations of rituals as sites where social categories and cohesion are reproduced through erecting boundaries around the liminal, the papers on this panel ask two interrelated questions: how do mundane, quotidian spaces become reworked by ritual, and how might attending to the spatiality and emplacement of ritual augment and extend this concept’s utility for the ethnography of contemporary Japan?

This panel's papers work to derive new methodological and theoretical insight by attending to ritual as both multi-sited and intertextual. To this point, O'Brien's paper gestures towards the role of space in how ritual's meaning is intersubjectively achieved. By showing how participants in multilingual, interfaith ceremonies frame the movement of words through discourse, O'Brien's paper argues that ritual space and its relation to elsewhere, like ritual itself, is performatively achieved rather than given. Separately, Dahlberg-Sears' close engagement of Condry's (2006) conceptualization of the *genba* through punk performances enquires: how might an expanded and revised notion of performance not only locate the *genba* in an increasing variety of everyday spaces but also challenge ethnographic notions of ritual participation? Together, these papers show how ritual's place in everyday life shapes how discrete instances of ritual are linked and understood and how rituals and their spaces reverberate far behind select limited venues.

Robert DAHLBERG-SEARS (The Ohio State University): *Expanding the Place of Action: Reconsidering the Genba*

In his 2006 volume *Hip-Hop Japan*, Ian Condry introduces the *genba*, "the place where something actually happens," as a concept for understanding the sociality of performance as reified by actions undertaken at that place. The delimiting factor set in place by Condry however was his focus on *genba* as places of social performance where something is generated – sociality, identity, products, musical performance. These spaces also have distinct beginnings and ends which can be broadly described as liminal. The hip-hop club or recording studio are spaces with hard borders after all. This presentation builds on Condry's *genba* to address the socio-musical community of punk in Japan and offer a more expansive vision of the concept. Punk music and culture in Japan is involved in a global circulation of performance stances and styles bound up in what it means to do (and *be*) "punk." Flexible, fluid, and sometimes contradictory, the word punk acts as both ontological pose for its adherents and frame onto performative action. From this punk is unbound from defined spaces or places and is rather socially or personally performed into being. By exploring observations and instances of punk performance such as live music, social recognition, or considering punk media, the broader possibilities of what constitutes a *genba* are made recognizable beyond places of circulating performance between producers and consumers, privileged by Condry.

Dylan H. O'BRIEN (University of California, San Diego): *Between Here and There: Multi-lingual and Multi-faith Audiences in Tokyo Synagogues and the Discursive Negotiation of Rituals' Space*

During my ethnographic research at Tokyo's oldest synagogue, I found a pamphlet from the 1990s for tourists keeping kosher. It lists the English translations of a wide variety of Japan-specific seafood and meat dishes, with English to Japanese translations of phrases to be pointed at, like "I cannot eat." This is but one dimension of how *halakha*, or Jewish religious law, has had to respond to the literal environment of Japan, but it is far from the only one. With Jewish congregations across Japan increasingly made up of Japanese-Jewish families, linguistic and religious differences are increasingly becoming another form of difference whose meaning for Jewish life and spiritual practice must be addressed, including in rituals.

And so I ask: just like how the different foods yielded by Japan's spatial difference prompted issues for *kasbrut* or dietary law, what role does spatial difference – Japan as the site of religious practice – play in Jewish rituals? Herein, I explore how the differences between 'here' and 'there' are frequently spoken of in sermons and at Shabbat dinner tables as mapping out different cultural and religious practices. With this paper, I show that what makes 'here' other is not self-evident and must often be instituted through specific types of discourse. Corollary, I show that the multilingual and multi-faith publics addressed by faith leaders at numerous open-to-the-public events – and increasingly, at synagogues with diverse families – must use specific strategies to show that practices from 'there' can be done 'here' – or that if they can't, 'here' is the reason.

In this paper, I draw on two and a half years of ethnography with multiple synagogues in Tokyo and Jewish organizations throughout Japan to analyze how 'here' and 'there' are discursively made evident in multilingual, multi-faith rituals. I look at the adaptations to rituals, such as a local Tokyo community's consumption of dragon fruit instead of pomegranates on Rosh Hashanah. I argue that 'here' is a discursive achievement registered through specific symbols. While the dragon fruit appears as an index of the stipulations of the new space, I argue that moments like this serve to make the limits and possibilities of Japan as a context for these rituals discursively present.

Maiko KODAKA (Waseda University): *Ritual, Virtuality, and the Emotional Labor of Oshi-Katsu*

This paper explores *oshi-katsu* (fan activity or supporting activity) among female fans of male porn actors, focusing on the roles of ritual and *virtuality* (Kapferer 2004) in shaping emotional experiences within commodified relationships in contemporary Japanese society. *Oshi-katsu* combines *oshi* (推し, "to support") and *katsu* (活, "activity") to describe the practice of actively supporting and engaging with one's favorite idols, celebrities, or fictional characters. Drawing on the narratives of three interlocutors, this study examines how long-term participation in *oshi-katsu* reshapes their perspectives on romance and intimacy. Central to this analysis is the concept of ritual as a framework that fosters sincerity and coherence in self-presentation. These rituals, often enacted in virtual spaces, create a shared subjunctive reality where participants perform acts of love and desire. The ethnographic findings highlight the complexities of navigating emotional connections within such a ritualized structure, exposing tensions between authenticity and commodification. The paper argues that the "desire to believe" motivates fans to construct their identities through ritualized performances, blurring the boundaries between genuine affection and transactional relationships.

By examining the interplay of ritual and *virtuality*, this study sheds light on how these elements shape both individual identity and collective belonging within niche fan cultures. It raises critical questions about the ethics of commodified relationships and the impact of ritualized practices on personal connections. Ultimately, it invites reflection on how emotional labor and societal norms intersect to redefine intimacy and selfhood in a rapidly changing social landscape in Japan.

Evan T. KOIKE (University of Tokyo): *A Town of Miracles and Rituals: (Re)shaping Spaces and Communities in Rural Nagi-cho*

Situated at the foot of a mountain around which mists constantly swirl, Nagi-cho stands an unlikely setting for the locality with the highest total fertility rate in Japan. Nicknamed Japan's "miracle town" for its defiance of national population trends, Nagi-cho is the site of concerted machizukuri or community-building efforts aimed at cultivating environments where parents may raise children with relative ease. Nevertheless, Nagi-cho's vibrant community does not shield the town from the challenges facing other ruralities, including urban-to-rural migration, vanishing ways of life, and aging populations.

In this presentation, I analyze how attempts to overcome these obstacles lead Nagi-cho's residents to engage in rituals that are woven into the fabric of everyday social life. These rituals lack the visibility of festivals and large events that take place frequently in the town and that succeed in mobilizing large outpourings of energy and solidarity among residents. However, Nagi-cho's mundane rituals nonetheless serve to reproduce, remake, and knit together spaces and communities in ways that cultivate local attachments and hope for the future.

Session 22

The practice of kyōsei: More-than-human rituals of living well together (PANEL)

How do everyday engagements with diverse others help people to live better? One way of thinking about the highly interconnected nature of wellbeing is offered by the Japanese concept of *kyōsei*, denoting symbiosis or conviviality and integrating social, political and biological forms of coexistence. While this term has been used and co-opted for different political purposes, Kyōsei Studies scholars emphasise the ways in which it denotes a form of co-existence that does not rely on homogenization, but rather allows a space for heterogeneity (e.g. Fuse 2011:227) and alterity (e.g. Shimizu et al. 2020). Living well together simply a stable and enduring state, but rather a continuous process, achieved through techniques that Overing and Passes call 'arts of conviviality'. In this panel we invite our contributors to reflect on the *practices of kyōsei*, on skills and techniques of living symbiotically. Many of these practices are formalized and ritualized, and hence offer an opportunity to think about kyōsei from the perspective of ritual studies, and vice versa, to emphasize the more-than-human aspects of rituals.

Iza KAVEDŽIJA, Harry WALKER (London School of Economics): *Growing Worlds: Urban gardening and aquascaping as world-making practices*

How do small, everyday rituals of tending to plants create meaningful worlds? In this paper we compare two distinct practices of cultivation: urban gardening in pots on doorsteps; and small-scale underwater gardening, or aquascaping. For many older residents of Osaka, growing vegetables in narrow urban alleyways, in pots lined up along doorsteps, bridges pleasure and necessity, cultivation and self-cultivation in more-than-human networks of care. Taking care of plants can help give a sense of structure to the day,

offer the pleasure of observing growth, and create opportunities for sociality. Aquascaping, meanwhile, embodies ideals of harmonious coexistence amidst carefully arranged layouts that often incorporate aesthetically pleasing assemblages of stone, driftwood, sand and soil in order to replicate natural habitats and ecosystems. For practitioners, these miniature worlds figure as calm spaces of refuge in which the attention is inexorably concentrated on a form of interspecies coexistence sustained through relatively constant, ritualised forms of care and attention.

Gergely MOHACSI (University of Osaka): *Decomposition and Reparation, or the More-than-Human Arts of Kyōsei*

Organic waste recycling in Japan is increasingly gaining momentum, from community composting to collaborative waste-to-energy initiatives creating spaces for humans and microorganisms to experiment together with new forms of cohabitation and ecological reparation. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted over the past two years, this paper explores the organic recycling of food waste at a communal composting site on the outskirts of Osaka where metabolic processes and grassroots activism interact and transform one another. I build on the notion of *bunkai* (decomposition) as elaborated by environmental humanist Tatsushi Fujihara to introduce a less considered aspect of coexistence into the discussion of *kyōsei*. By describing the daily rituals of turning school lunch leftovers into fertilizer and back into school lunches, I will highlight how composting collectives can function as laboratories for practicing *kyōsei*. The argument presented is that caring for the soil is a recursive form of eating together, where the metabolism becomes an ongoing interplay of composing and decomposing many different worlds.

Paul HANSEN (Akita University): *Dances with Cows: Finding Kyosei and Otherness in an Animal-Human-Machine*

Working with cows on an industrial dairy farm is a highly repetitive and ritualized process. In the case of Tokachi, Hokkaido's Grand Hopes dairy farm, three times a day, every day, around three thousand Holstien cows, sixty human workers, two rotary milking parlours, and two fully automated ones need to work in reasonable harmony to produce, store, and distribute thousands of litres of milk, a highly perishable, indeed living product. Looking at a dairy farm from a macro perspective such as economics or policy, it is easy to essentialise this multitude of more-than-human relations into functional units, the average cow, the typical worker, or sensed rotations per minute. However, this paper focuses on the necessary relations of *kyosei* that work against standardization and reduction. It foregrounds both a recognition of Otherness of kind, but also an 'each Otherness' required when bovine, human and technology are thrust together and pulled apart in the daily "dance" to make milk on an industrial scale.

Session 23

Yohko TSUJI (Cornell University): *Ancestor Worship in Jeopardy in an Old Osaka Neighborhood*

This paper explores how people in Jōfukuji, an old community in the Osaka suburbs, have been practicing ancestor worship and considers the future of this tradition. The baby boomers in Jōfukuji (born in 1947-1949) grew up in traditional three-generation families, witnessing daily, monthly, and periodical rites for their forebears. Today, there are only a few multi-generation families in Jōfukuji. Most nuclear families consist of aging parent(s) and unmarried adult child(ren). Furthermore, elders living alone are increasing. Nonetheless, Jōfukuji baby boomers continue ancestor worship by regularly visiting family graves, monthly receiving the priest from the family temple at their homes and holding periodical death anniversaries. There are two major modifications, however. First, major rituals, such as funerals and memorial rites, are simplified with fewer attendees. Second, these rites are held outside the community at ceremonial halls. While these changes ease the task, the future of ancestor worship in Jōfukuji is uncertain because: 1) the practitioners are aging; 2) many in the next generation have moved away; and 3) there is no plan or discussion to adopt an alternative to the traditional rites, such as building a collective and eternally worshipped grave.

Oskar DYLEWSKI (Jagiellonian University): *Glimpses from Kamagasaki – Lived experience and social resistance of Homeless people in Osaka*

Paper examines the lived experiences of homelessness in Kamagasaki intertwining personal fieldnotes, theoretical insights, and creative expressions. Kamagasaki, a historically marginalized urban district, serves as both a sanctuary and a site of struggle for those displaced by systemic inequalities. Drawing from ethnographic encounters, workshops, and grassroots activism, it explores how residents articulate their precarious realities through poetry, protest, and collective memory.

The paper situates these narratives within broader theoretical frameworks, including Judith Butler's concept of precarity, Deleuze's notions of desire, and Michael Fischer's subjectivity in crisis. It reflects on the body as a site of survival, memory, and resistance, revealing how individuals navigate the intersection of structural oppression and personal agency. It also positions homelessness in the framework of rhythm analysis to show the "rituality of no-hope".

Through the lens of cultural and historical analysis, it addresses the impact of systemic dispossession, from post-war survival to contemporary neoliberal redevelopment, on Kamagasaki's residents. Case studies, such as the poem *Fabric of Dreams* created by one resident, underscore the tension between stigmatized representations and the community's emic counter-definitions of identity and place.

The paper seeks to challenge dominant narratives of homelessness, offering an alternative perspective on human resilience, solidarity, and the pursuit of dignity amidst systemic exclusion.

Luiz GARCIA (Soka University): *Fostering Social Justice Praxis for Critical Consciousness in Early Childhood*

This paper explores the implications of integrating young children into activities that dismantle social constructions of gender and race within the Japanese context. Taking a sociological and anthropological approach, I introduce data from ethnographic fieldwork in settings of early childhood education in international schools and within Japanese households in Tokyo, showing what results from exploring critical race and gender in early childhood. Based on two pillars – representation and critical praxis – I conceptualize a framework of social justice education (SJE), which I apply in the activities led with children aged 4 to 7.

Psychological research shows that as early as the age of two and three, children recognize themselves as separate individuals from others and start building a sense of self. They start expressing and situating themselves through relational experiences with family members, and then into expanding environments. My observations also highlight how this awareness leads to children’s sense of belonging or sense of exclusion, and how they fit into the social spaces in which they grow.

My fieldwork shows the extent to which collective and multi-contextual efforts are necessary to introduce a world in which children feel represented. At the same time, I argue efforts at representation are not enough to prepare youngsters to act in the case of discrimination, which I show ethnographically can be detrimental to their imaginative ambitions. Here critical praxis proves to be a significant tool for building the agency to resist/combat imposed normative discursive practices that form the core of limiting children’s imagination and identity.

Session 24

Hisako OMORI (Akita International University): *Mothering and Deathbed Conversion Rituals: A Case of Roman Catholics in Tokyo*

Women outnumber men in Roman Catholic gatherings in Tokyo—be it a regular Mass, a prayer group gathering, or spiritual retreats led by priests. In the context of Japan, these Catholic women are a minority among the Buddhist-Shinto majority population, but this minority status could extend to their homes. These women could be the only Catholic in their respective households. This paper discusses the practice of emergency baptism of adults who are either dying or have learned that their demise is within sight. In the archdiocese of Tokyo, it is not unusual to hear about the “conversion on deathbed” (*rinjū senrei*). Oftentimes, there is an active Catholic lay woman involved in the process of deathbed conversion.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and one-on-one in-depth interviews of individuals who were directly involved in the practice of conversion of adult family members, this study makes the case of “deathbed conversion” as the results of women’s “mothering,” that is, her experience of nurturing other members of the family through daily practice of being a motherly figure in the household. Following Adrienne Rich’s work, *Of Woman Born*, this article makes a distinction between institutional motherhood, which may be underscored by patriarchal values, and the experience of “mothering” as an act of nurturing others, from

which women may feel empowered, the experience of which could become a source of pride, joy, and rewarding feeling. Although the typical usage of the term, mothering, may be confined to the act of raising one's own children, the current paper extends this term to include the nurturance of one's family members, of which one's husband is also a part. By focusing on the women who organize a baptismal rite at the end of a family member's life, the paper illustrates the strategy and resourcefulness of those who practice a minority religion in Tokyo.

Konstantinos ZORBAS (Shandong University): *Shifting Landscapes of North Asian Shamanic Religions: A View from Abashiri, Hokkaido*

In this paper, I will analyse shifting patterns of Northern shamanism with a focus on indigenous museum artefacts based in Abashiri, Okhotsk sub-Prefecture (Hokkaido). "Shamanism", a religious category principally associated with Siberian, Mongolian, and Arctic indigenous societies and their spiritual traditions, holds a somewhat distinct place in the anthropology of religion, since it refers to living (or revitalized) practices of ancestor worship or nature propitiation through symbols and shamanic talismans as vessels for the "spirits". This presentation will revolve around the following question: how can shamanic rituals, associated with currently non-existing (hunting or pastoralist) indigenous peoples of Northern Russia, the Far East (Sakhalin), and the adjacent native cultures of Hokkaido, be reconstituted through museum collections in multi-ethnic settings? I will argue that the significance or novelty of the field data (which derive from the unique collections of the Hokkaido Museum of Northern Peoples, as well as from other sites in Abashiri, provide us with unusual insights in shamanic religions as hyper-extended and shifting landscapes, whose geographical or cultural frontiers are sources of spiritual revitalization.

Session 25

Ivan CROSCENKO (University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Waseda University): *Nō Theatre as a Ritual: 'Provincial Nō Theatre' in Yamagata and Niigata Prefectures*

Performing arts have been a crucial part of a much larger ritual complex: they can be the climax of religious rituals, a gathering moment for communities, or even both. The performative act undoubtedly possesses a multitude of layers that can be analysed from an anthropological viewpoint, and its role as a kind of ritual is one of those.

One particularly intriguing case within Japanese performing arts is what can be called 'Provincial Nō Theatre', a series of various heterodox traditions of Nō Theatre which came to life between the end of the Muromachi and Edo periods primarily in the Shōnai (Yamagata prefecture) and Kaetsu (Niigata prefecture) regions. It can be relatively complex to describe them simply as Nō Theatre because of their heterogeneous performative techniques, unique aesthetic choices and, most importantly, the social context that surrounds them. While 'official Nō Theatre' developed in the world of the daimyō and shōgun, 'Provincial Nō Theatre' thrived in rural villages and small towns where the locals are both actors and participants, embedded in a communitarian spirit. For centuries these heterodox traditions were

intertwined with religious rituals, but in the last fifty years each community has created new social events whose climax is their local versions of Nō Theatre.

This paper aims to analyse four ‘Provincial Nō Theatre’ traditions, namely Kurokawa Nō, Yamato Nō, Ōsuda Nō and Matsuyama Nō as both religious and social rituals which can be divided into four main phases with their own rules and etiquette: the gathering, the offering to the deities (only during shintō rituals) the performance, and the convivial moment.

Marco DI FRANCESCO (University of Oxford): *Changing Ritual Practices in the 21st-Century Rakugo World*

Among the many characteristics of ritual practices anthropologists have contribute to highlight, ritual’s overlaps with performance and its association with tradition are long-established areas of enquiry. It might seem natural, then, that the world of *rakugo* storytellers – a community dedicated to a traditional performing art – abounds with ritual practices. The *rakugo* art world is less formally (and legally) structured than *iemoto*-based traditions, making rituals fundamental in establishing symbolic boundaries and social organisation. What complicates the picture, however, is the comedic nature of *rakugo*, which flows from the stage into everyday practices, playing with and poking at the funniness of human behaviour – and what better target than rituals? The supremacy of laughter and of audience satisfaction in an art world where performers still make a living out of ticket sales rather than governmental subsidies, results in *rakugoka* often stretching or breaking norms and taboos within rituals, at times risking undermining the very boundaries rituals help create, and upsetting those invested in preserving traditions. In this paper, based on one year of ethnographic fieldwork among *rakugo* storytellers, I explore both mundane and festive rituals in the *rakugo* world, from symbolically charged stage conventions, to mundane backstage etiquette, to celebratory rites of passage. I will pay particular attention to the great deal of changes that accompanied the revival of popularity of *rakugo* in 21st -century Japan, and how this affected the shape and role of ritual practices in the field, hopefully contributing to a broader understanding of rituals in contemporary Japan and beyond.

Patrick S. D. MCCARTNEY (University of Hiroshima): *Ritual Acrobatics and Agricultural Pole Climbing Rituals*

My current research project is a global ethno-history of agricultural bamboo pole climbing rituals. The pole is symbolic of the sun, order and royal ascent. It is the law giver and bestower of prosperity, fertility and abundance. This ‘shamanic’ act of ascending the pole into the celestial realms is a universal act. I have applied archaeo-astronomical and art historical methods to the shared mythical origins and historiographical development of pole climbing rituals, which feature in Paleolithic cave paintings and megalithic structures of Europe, India and China.

This research began with South Asia’s ‘wrestler’s pole,’ which is mentioned in a 12th century CE encyclopedic Sanskrit. Following the Buddhist controlled trade routes connecting South and Central Asia

led me to Japan to begin considering the similarities and particularities of ritual acrobatics (i.e., as types of sorcery) and its blending with Shugendō and Kagura.

Japan's pole climbing spectacles occur during spring and autumn festivals, but they also occur in the middle of winter. My research into such events in Japan is still preliminary, having conducted some multi-sited field work during 2024 (and early 2025). Therefore, the presentation will focus on highlighting some events I attended in Hiroshima City, Kyushu (Minami-Aso and Nagasaki City), Uwajima (Ehime) and Nagoya City, while contextualising some of the observations and projections for future research in and beyond Japan. I will also discuss the unique and shared characteristics of Japan's pole climbing rituals and ritual practices in contemporary Japanese society and how this assists to understand similar spectacles held elsewhere.

Session 27

Green Grow the Rushes Go. Environments Shaping (Ritual) Practices of Feeling with the World, Local Knowledge, and Politics (PANEL)

Andrea De Antoni (Kyoto University)

This panel analyzes how environments afford and shape affective (ritual) practices, influencing local ways of being in the world, knowledge, and politics. Recent anthropological interest in phenomenology, embodiment, and sensory dimensions of the social has often been criticized for neglecting structural issues of power and inequality. This panel contributes to this discussion by examining how environments actively shape sensory and affective experiences through (ritual) practice. Drawing on Tim Ingold's (2011) notion of correspondences between humans and their surroundings, and De Antoni and Dumouchel's (2017) concept of "practices of feeling with the world," we consider how these interactions produce emergent social and cultural realities, including spirits.

The panel considers various ethnographic contexts where landscapes, rituals, and feelings entangle. Through case studies focusing on wildlife conflicts in rural Japan, the adaptation of Afro-Brazilian religious rituals in the Japanese diaspora, and spirit-mediated practices in Okinawa, it analyzes how environments influence affective dynamics and local ontologies. By focusing on these relationships, the panel sheds light on how (ritual) practices of feeling with the world shape and are shaped by local knowledge and socio-political dimensions. Thus, it contributes to broader debates in anthropology regarding embodiment, sensory experience, and the politics of place, offering insights into how feelings, practices, and environments co-constitute modes of being and knowing in the world.

Oribe GOHARA (Hosei University): *People-wildlife conflicts in Shiiba village, Miyazaki. Hunters' Knowledge, Practices, and Beliefs about Wildlife*

This presentation focuses on people-wildlife conflicts in Shiiba Village, Miyazaki. Hunting has long been a major subsistence activity in Shiiba Village, with traditional hunting lore passed down through generations. However, since around the year 2000, the locals have been facing significant damage due to the increased

populations of wild animals such as boars, deer, and monkeys. In this presentation, I will explore how local hunters have addressed these challenges, focusing on their hunting skills, knowledge, and beliefs/rituals about wildlife. The study aims to answer the question: How has traditional hunting culture been applied to contemporary wildlife damage control?

To address this question, I will rely on the concepts of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge), affect, environment, and place. The ethnography shows that the success of pest-control hunting largely depends on hunters' knowledge and beliefs about the mountains and animals, which revolve around ideas of the mountain deity, hunting rituals, and their perceptions of animals. By looking at specific case studies, this study examines how the natural environment has shaped the people-wildlife relationships and hunters' sensory and affective experiences in a contemporary mountain society in Japan.

Daniela CALVO (JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow, Kyoto University): *Encounters of Afro-Brazilian Religions and Japanese Spirits. Affect, Healing and Feeling with the World*

Brazilian immigrants brought their religions, imaginaries, ways of feeling and sensing with the world with them to Japan. They found (sometimes precarious) forms of adaptation, contact, hybridisation, rupture, separation, encounter, conflict, confluence and creativity. In Japan, Afro-Brazilian religions (particularly Umbanda and Quimbanda) spread, reaching about 30 religious centers and numerous small groups congregating in homes or other natural or constructed places. Many people enter Umbanda after having experiences with spirits and haunted places, developing sensibilities and abilities to know past or future events (which are interpreted in terms of mediumship). In fact, Afro-Brazilian religions include belief in life after death and the possibility of communicating with spirits. The development of mediumship intensifies the ability to hear, see, speak to, sense, taste, smell and feel spirits. This presentation analyses the range of practices and ways to experience spirits and to “feel with the world” that emerge from the encounters of the practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions with local spirits and haunted places, as well as the new forms of hybridisation of practices and ontologies, shocks, health issues and the adaptation of healing practices that result from these experiences. For example, Japanese spirits may appear in Afro-Brazilian healing rituals, and the practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions may use their knowledge to heal suffering spirits and haunted places.

Andrea DE ANTONI (Kyoto University): *Near Wild Heaven. Feeling with the World, Healing, and Sentient Political Ecologies Among Okinawan Yuta*

This presentation analyzes how healing (ritual) practices, affective attunements, and relational engagements with sacred places contribute to ontogenesis—the emergent creation of new modes of being and affective “sentient ecologies” (Ingold 2000). In doing so, it sheds light on how these emergent processes entangle with political views, discourses, and power relations.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with Okinawan yuta (traditional shamanic healers), this presentation focuses on their transformative healing processes related to kamidaari—a sacred illness experienced as proof

of their shamanic calling. Yuta heal through ritualized training at sacred sites, where they develop the capacity to “connect” with and receive “messages” from spirits and deities specific to each location. Moving beyond narrative-centered models of healing, the presentation conceptualizes yuta healing practices as forms of “feeling with the world” shaped by specific environments, and as enskilled processes that enable them to experience Okinawa as an enlivened, sacred spirit world. It reveals how these modalities of feeling are both shaped by and shape local politics and discourses, fostering healing, empowerment, and care, while reconfiguring the boundaries between the everyday and the spiritual. By integrating phenomenological approaches to healing with ecological dimensions, this presentation sheds light on how healing involves literal transformations of reality through embodied and affective engagements.

Session 28

Alistair SWALE (University of Canterbury): *The Regulation of ‘Licentious’ Practices and Rituals in Late Meiji and early Taishō Japan*

Amongst the rituals or ritualistic conventions that are integrated within the fabric of culture, those pertaining to sex and sexual relations are some of the most pervasive and, at times, contentious. Japan, in the wake of the ‘civilization drive’ sparked by the Meiji Restoration, saw a rather extraordinary reforming of conventions associated with public conduct, often with relevance to sexuality or sexual practices. The Ordinances for governing public conduct promulgated in the early 1870s (*Isbikikaijōrei*, 違式註違条例) proscribed mixed bathing, public ‘nudity’ (wearing the *fudoshi*) and other common practices that were regarded as ‘uncivilized’. It is less widely known that even *bon odori* festivals were banned in 1874 for being “extremely licentious” events.

By the end of the Meiji period, most of these reforms had been well ‘bedded in’, but one figure who was of a mind to push against the seeming *fait accompli* of change in public *mores* was Miyatake Gaikotsu. He had long been exceptional within the publishing world for being willing to add an erotic dimension to his otherwise scandal-mongering satire in publications such as *Kokkei Shinbun*. He also published a history of obscenity in Japan, *Waisetsu Fūzokushi* (『猥褻風俗史』, 1911), which outlined pre-Meiji cultural practices related to sexuality and sexual relations, and criticized official interventions in such matters, including *bon odori*. Overall, this paper aims to outline the content of this little-researched work, as well as explore its relevance to the evolution of ritualistic practices related to sexual relations in late Meiji and Taishō Japan.

Marta FANASCA (University of Bologna, Hosei University): *Ritualizing Intimacy: Gender, Female Agency, and the Commodification of Desire in Contemporary Japan’s Pink Economy*

In contemporary Japan, the market for female/female commodified emotional and/or sexual intimacy, though a niche market, is developing at the intersection of private desire and money. Several businesses focused on providing emotions, support, or more bodily-oriented and less platonic services for women are

emerging, shaping a new sector of the pink economy closely tied to the urban landscape. Despite differences among these services (dates, sex, sexual massages etc), it is impossible not to notice the constant performance of certain acts or the repletion of sequences of actions—not only across repeated meetings within the same business, but also between different types of services—which imbues encounters between providers and clients with a sense of “ritual”. Using Joey Hendry’s suggestions about the relationship between reality and authenticity (2000) as a starting point, and drawing on Baudrillard’s concept of hyperrealism (1981/2001), this intervention highlights and discusses how paid encounters between providers of commodified intimacy and clients can be understood as “semi-ritual” space to explore gender, sex and emotions.

Taking as case studies a) the business of Female-to-Male crossdressing (*dansō*) escorts offering dates to their female clients, and b) female prostitution for women, my aim is to explore how these practices navigate the intersections of gender, commodification, and female agency, highlighting how ritualized interactions serve as a medium through which clients and providers negotiate identity and intimacy within a market-driven framework.

Yan LI (Center for Global Initiatives, Osaka University): *The ritualized practices of parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs*

The ritualized practices of parental involvement in education “communicate to both students and parents, at least implicitly, if not explicitly, broader societal messages and norms” and “socialize parents to cultural expectations regarding their place and roles in schools in general, and regarding their children’s education in particular” (Doucet, 2011, p. 404). Among these practices, participation in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) represents a key form of parental involvement. In Japan, participation in PTAs is regarded as a nearly universal “volunteer” activity for parents of children enrolled in formal education, spanning preschool to high school (Nakayama, 2016). However, such involvement, typically undertaken by mothers, is often not truly voluntary but rather *de facto* mandatory (Seo, 2018).

Drawing on school materials collected by the author as a mother of two children attending a public elementary school in Japan, this paper explores how ritualized practices shape the nature of parental involvement in Japanese school PTAs. These materials are supplemented with academic and non-academic publications, documents from official school PTA websites, publications by national and local governments, and royalty-free images retrieved using targeted keywords.

The paper demonstrates how the ritualized practices of fathers’ and mothers’ participation in PTAs shape societal expectations of parental roles, reinforce gendered responsibilities in children’s education, and socialize parents into these roles. Furthermore, it highlights how these practices perpetuate gender and school-family inequalities through the lens of school rituals in Japanese society.