

32nd Gender Workshop for Research on Japan (12–13 Nov 2026)

in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Association for Social Science Research on Japan

Thursday, 12th November

	13:00	Welcome Kerstin Fookien, Tim Heißenberger, Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer
Social Sciences Panel 1 – Women's Lived Realities	13:20 – 14:00	Annette Schad-Seifert (Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf) <i>Staging Singlehood: Solo Weddings, the Rise of the “Solo Consumer”, and Sexual Capital in Contemporary Japan</i>
	14:00 – 14:40	Lynne Nakano (Chinese University of Hong Kong) <i>The Rise of Women Primary Earners in Urban Japan: An Anthropological Perspective on the Subjective Meanings of Women's Financial Independence</i>
	14:40 – 15:20	Evan Koike (Shimonoseki City University) <i>Gendered Care and Welfare from Below: Single Mothers and the Role of Kodomo Shokudō in Regional Japan</i>
Coffee Break		
Social Sciences Panel 2 – Trans & Masculinity Studies	16:00 – 16:40	Lyman Gamberton (University of Leeds) <i>Transnational Transphobia: Anti-Transgender Discourses and their International Influences in Contemporary Japan</i>
	16:40 – 17:20	Caterina Pavan (University of Turin) <i>Beyond Metronormativity: Trans Masculinities in the Japanese Inaka</i>
	17:20 – 18:00	Jiahui Ding (Heidelberg University/Tōhoku University) <i>Kawaii and Hegemonic: Dual Masculinity and Disney Consumption in Contemporary Japan</i>

Friday, 13th November

Cultural Studies Panel – Literary & Game Studies	09:00 – 09:40	Michaela Oberwinkler (Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf) <i>Gender-Differing Expectations of Marriage in Tsujimura Mizuki's Arrogance and Virtue</i>
	09:40 – 10:20	Rino Endo (Freie Universität Berlin) <i>Eating as Resistance: Bodies, Femininity, and Psychological Boundary Formation in Yuzuki Asako's Novel Butter</i>
	10:30 – 11:10	Hanna Jaśkiewicz (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) <i>Performing Femininity in Ōsaka Dialect in Contemporary Japanese Prose</i>
	11:10 – 11:50	Sara Morini (Sapienza University of Rome) <i>Militarized Shōjo Across Borders: Gendered War Memory in Kantai Collection and Azur Lane</i>
Coffee Break		
The Life and Work of Haneda Sumiko	12:20 – 13:20	Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández (The Japan Society London) <i>(Auto)biography and Women's History in Haneda Sumiko's Independent Cinema</i>
		Irene González-López (Birkbeck College, University of London) <i>Women's Voices and Women's Subjectivity in the Documentaries of Haneda Sumiko</i>
	13:20	Closing Discussion

* Program may be subject to change.

Abstracts

Thursday, November 12th, 2026

Panel 1: Social Sciences – Women’s Lived Realities

Staging Singlehood: *Solo Weddings*, the Rise of the ‘Solo Consumer,’ and Sexual Capital in Contemporary Japan

Annete Schad-Seifert, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany)

Lifelong singlehood is a social experience affecting an increasing number of people in Japan. In recent years, so-called *solo weddings* have garnered significant media and academic attention in and outside of Japan. This refers to ceremonies in which single women – without a partner – participate in a staged photo shoot while wearing bridal attire; offered by wedding agencies or photography studios as a service specifically tailored to female clients.

This paper examines *solo weddings* as a cultural phenomenon situated at the intersection of consumer culture, shifting norms regarding marriage and gender, and what Eva Illouz has described as “sexual capital” in neo-liberal market societies. The phenomenon of *solo weddings* represents just one of many “solo activities” (*sorokatsu*) that have emerged within Japan’s consumer culture in recent years. The trend of catering to the “solo consumer” (*o-hitorisama*) – offering activities such as traveling or dining out – and the demand for services tailored to one person only have surged, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Japan, not only is the proportion of unmarried individuals increasing, but also a diminishing desire for romantic relationships was confirmed by statistical data. Concurrently, the staging of virtual relationships and “pseudo-romantic” experiences on social media platforms is on the rise. This paper explores the question of whether *solo weddings* can be interpreted as part of this virtual and “pseudo-romantic” staging. Drawing on quantitative data, media analyses, and social-science research, this paper argues that *solo weddings* should be understood less as an expression of social isolation and more as an ambivalent practice of self-affirmation in a society where the economic resources needed to follow a traditionally gendered life course are steadily dwindling.

The Rise of Women Primary Earners in Urban Japan: An Anthropological Perspective on the Subjective Meanings of Women’s Financial Independence

Lynne Nakano, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)

Women who are the primary earners in their families or who are financially self-supporting comprise large percentages of the population, yet little is known about them and their strategies in managing family and work, and how they view their lives and experiences. Based on anthropological interviews conducted with 55 women who are the primary earners in their families in urban Japan – primarily in Osaka – this paper considers how women primary earners of various marital statuses discuss the management of their finances and time, and how they view and create meaning in their lives.

The paper argues that due to the emphasis on the male breadwinning model in Japan, women primary earners interviewed feel socially and culturally invisible in spite of their high numbers; they do not feel that they are doing anything special nor do they identify with a particular social category. Most women in this study earn average salaries and do not see themselves as career women. In many cases, they have become primary earners not because of any desire for this status, but due to circumstances beyond their control such as their or their partners' career situations, economic environments, and the need for income. In spite of the circumscribed conditions that resulted in them becoming primary earners, the women interviewed felt that they had control over the quality of their lives and emphasized the importance of pursuing a way of life that is personally meaningful. The study suggests that the rise of women primary earners in urban Japan is not necessarily bringing about women's empowerment in relationships or changes in gender roles or ideologies, but rather is providing women with more space to consider and pursue activities and relationships that aligns with their values and that bring personal meaning.

Gendered Care and Welfare from Below: Single Mothers and the Role of *Kodomo Shokudō* in Regional Japan

Evan T. Koike, Shimonoseki City University (Japan)

Over the past decade, the number of *kodomo shokudō*, or children's cafeterias, has risen sharply across Japan. Portrayed by the media as volunteer-run initiatives predominantly supporting low-income families, *kodomo shokudō* have since evolved into diverse community spaces that fulfill a wide range of local roles and needs.

Yet one of their most important functions remains providing assistance to single mothers and their children, who are disproportionately affected by economic precarity and care burdens. Drawing upon ongoing fieldwork and interviews conducted among *kodomo shokudō* in Hokkaido and Okinawa, this paper examines the regionally diverse constraints that single mothers face. It further analyzes the ways in which *kodomo shokudō* seek to support such women while facing obstacles in the form of institutional barriers and insufficient resources. By situating these findings within Japan's shifting welfare landscape, the paper considers both the potential and the limitations of "welfare from below" as a response to gendered inequalities. In doing so, it highlights how such community-based initiatives as *kodomo shokudō* can simultaneously alleviate and reveal the challenges facing single mothers in contemporary Japan.

Panel 2: Social Sciences – Trans & Masculinity Studies

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

Lyman R.T. Gamberton, University of Leeds (UK)

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

Discourses that attack transgender people from an ostensibly feminist perspective have been increasing transnationally since 2017. While these arguments are couched as feminist or progressive, they are often endorsed or advanced by illiberal populist groups, both in the UK and in Japan (c.f. Yamaguchi, 2009). Although Japanese feminist movements have historically been neutral-to-welcoming regarding trans women (Hori, 2019), the Summer of 2018 saw an explosive spike in anti-transgender messaging on the Japanese internet, especially on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter. The commonly-accepted trigger for this was the decision of Ochanomizu and Tsuda Universities to accept trans women as students regardless of the legal gender listed on their *koseki* [family register]. These anti-transgender sentiments were presented as an evolution of Japanese feminist consciousness following the rise of the country's #MeToo movement and high-profile sexual assault cases such as that of the journalist Itō Shiori. However, as Shimizu (2020) observes, much of this backlash is not a product of 'indigenous' Japanese feminism at all, but rather imported from Anglophone sources. This transnational angle is also evident in the ways that transphobia has moved offline and into the Japanese political sphere, including the use of phrases like "TRA [Trans Rights Activist]" to describe moderate or conservative politicians like Inada Tomomi.

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

Beyond Metronormativity: Trans Masculinities in the Japanese *Inaka*

Caterina Pavan, University of Turin (Italy)

Trans men remain underrepresented in both Japanese trans studies and masculinity studies, with existing scholarship focusing almost exclusively on individuals living in Tōkyō (Yuen 2018, 2020). This narrows our understanding of trans experiences in Japan by conflating urban spaces with the viability of trans lives and treating the capital as a normative frame, a phenomenon that Halberstam (2005: 36) terms "metronormativity", while obscuring the ways in which regional differences shape trans lives.

My research addresses this gap by adopting an inductive approach grounded in the experiences of trans men in Kyūshū, a revealing site for examining how masculinities are constructed, negotiated, and inhabited in provincial and rural settings (*inaka* 田舎). Drawing on eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork, I explore how my research participants make sense of their identities and enact their masculinities in a region commonly associated with conservative gender norms and expectations.

I argue that, while presenting challenges to the life of gender non-conforming individuals, the *inaka* is a place of possibility for trans lives, contributing to shaping their understanding of their own gender identity, in a constant negotiation between the pursuit of *jibunrashisa* 自分らしさ (lit. "being true to oneself") and the adoption of normative masculine behaviors, which are influenced by regional understandings of maleness.

By foregrounding regionality and lived experience, this contribution presents preliminary findings from my research that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Japanese trans

masculinities are locally produced, embodied, and negotiated over time in rural and provincial contexts. In doing so, it speaks to broader discussions on the relationship between authenticity and normative expectations in the formation of gendered identities.

Kawaii and Hegemonic: Dual Masculinity and Disney Consumption in Contemporary Japan

Jiahui Ding, Heidelberg University (Germany) / Tohoku University (Japan)

This paper examines how the consumption of Tokyo Disneyland by male-only groups, pairs, and solo male visitors – popularly known as “Disney Boys” (ディズニー男子) – reveals a significant shift in contemporary Japanese masculine identity construction. While Disney parks in the US, Paris, and Shanghai attract primarily families, couples, and mixed friend groups, Tokyo stands apart: men ranging from high school students to their thirties actively claim this culturally feminine and childlike space as their own – a practice that has received virtually no scholarly attention.

I argue that Japan’s otaku-inflected culture has already normalized “kawaii culture” consumption among young men across the masculinity spectrum – including those embodying hegemonic ideals– a pattern I term dual masculinity (Ding 2025), whereby hegemonic status and feminized consumption coexist. Disney’s pervasive presence in Japan intensifies this dynamic across distinct spatial registers. Drawing on Butler’s gender performativity theory and Connell’s hegemonic masculinity framework, I propose that repeated engagement with Disney – in theme parks as extraordinary spaces and university fan clubs as semi-daily spaces – opens the possibility of loosening and rewriting normative masculine scripts.

Findings draw on participant observation and twenty semi-structured interviews at three Japanese university Disney clubs (Tohoku University, University of Tokyo, Keio University). Ongoing European fieldwork situates these patterns within a comparative framework. Together, this research demonstrates that Disney consumption in Japan constitutes a distinctive space in which normative masculine scripts are actively loosened and rewritten – revealing that popular culture fandom can function as an unexpected site of gender transformation in contemporary Japan.

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Panel 3: Cultural Studies – Literary and Game Studies

Gender-Differing Expectations of Marriage in Tsujimura Mizuki’s *Arrogance and Virtue*

Michaela Oberwinkler, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany)

Although Tsujimura Mizuki (辻村深月) is primarily known as a mystery writer, *Gōman to zenryō* (*Arrogance and Virtue*, 2019) resists easy categorization as either a conventional mystery novel or a love story. Instead, it offers a nuanced literary examination of contemporary social issues, particularly changing expectations of marriage among younger generations in Japan. The novel

alternates between the perspectives of its two protagonists, Mami, a 35-year-old woman, and Kakeru, a 39-year-old man, who meet through a matchmaking application, become engaged, and appear to establish a harmonious relationship until Mami suddenly disappears.

As the narrative progresses, Kakeru must reassess both his understanding of their relationship and their diverging expectations of marriage. Through conversations with acquaintances and relatives during his search, he gradually comes to recognize previously unseen aspects of his fiancée's inner life, aspects that point toward deeply embedded societal structures surrounding marriage. It is becoming increasingly clear that Mami's disappearance was neither violent nor externally imposed, but rather a necessary consequence of misunderstandings that can be interpreted as forms of "arrogance": assumptions made in the pursuit of harmony that fail to acknowledge the actual needs and desires of the other partner. The resulting psychological burden ultimately compels Mami to withdraw from her former life.

Through a close reading of the novel, this paper examines the social mechanisms that produce gender-differentiated interpretations of marriage, manifested as unintended arrogance on the one hand and virtue carried to a self-destructive extreme on the other. Finally, it considers the tentative resolution proposed by the novel and its implications for overcoming these conflicting expectations.

Eating as Resistance: Bodies, Femininity, and Psychological Boundary Formation in Asako Yuzuki's Novel *Butter*

Rino Endo, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)

This study examines the significance of eating and psychological boundary formation in Asako Yuzuki's novel *Butter* (2020), situating the work within discourses on gender, body politics, and food culture in contemporary Japan. Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates how the novel critically interrogates societal beauty standards, specifically the pervasive pressure on women to maintain thinness. Within this framework, eating emerges as an act of resistance, self-empowerment, and social critique.

Against the backdrop of a pervasive ideal of thinness in Japan, the novel juxtaposes two contrasting female figures: Manako Kajii, a woman accused of multiple murders who consciously defies societal expectations regarding the female body, and the journalist Rika Machida, who initially embodies the ideal of the disciplined, slender woman. During her interviews with Kajii, Rika becomes increasingly intrigued by Kajii's confident relationship with food and corporeality. These encounters trigger a profound bodily and psychological transformation. The novel employs food and eating as narrative devices to destabilize normative gender roles and to bring issues of autonomy, desire, and social control to the fore. Through her altered relationship with food, Rika becomes conscious of the internalized mechanisms that have shaped her self-image and conduct. The weight gain she experiences over the course of the plot provokes critical reactions from her social environment, exposing the societal surveillance of female bodies. Concurrently, it prompts Rika to reflect on her own complicity in sustaining these normative standards.

This paper argues that *Butter* frames eating as a radical act that challenges hegemonic constructions of femininity and redefines psychological boundaries. Rika's trajectory represents not only a personal transformation but also a political awakening. The novel demonstrates how everyday practices can contest power structures, offering an alternative model of femininity

grounded in self-acceptance, autonomy, and bodily freedom. Consequently, *Butter* establishes itself as a significant contribution to contemporary Japanese literature and to scholarly debates on gender, embodiment, and resistance.

Performing femininity in Osaka dialect in contemporary Japanese prose

Hanna Jaśkiewicz, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland)

Although research has shown that so-called “women’s language”—linguistic features commonly associated with female speakers—does not reflect actual language use (Okamoto 1995; Ohara 2019) and should instead be understood as an ideological construct that emerged with Japanese modernity (Inoue 2002), such features nonetheless appear frequently in fictional texts. Accordingly, Kinsui (2003) conceptualizes gendered speech as *yakuwarigo*, a form of register-based stylization. Most previous studies have focused on standard Japanese. Exceptions include Shibamoto Smith and Occhi (2009), who examine dialect and femininity in television dramas, and King et al. (2022), who show how Osaka dialect *Naru* is used in in Kore-eda’s *Soshite, Chichi ni* in order to construct alternative masculinity.

Building on these studies, the present paper examines how Osaka dialect is used by female characters in contemporary Japanese literature and what role it plays in their characterization. The corpus consists of six novels: *Haru no Yume* (1985), *Yuki ga Furu Made* (1985), *Naniwa Shōnen Tanteidan* (1988), *Tsūtenkaku* (2006), *Purinsesu Toyotomi* (2009), and *Kono Onna* (2011). First, the speech of female characters is analysed with regard to the frequency of dialectal markers and gender-indexical features, including self-reference, address terms, sentence-final particles, honorifics, and interjections (Okamoto 1995: 301), and compared with patterns associated with standard Japanese. These linguistic features are then interpreted within the broader narrative context to explore their role in the characterization of female characters.

The results indicate that register-based stylization is also present in the fictional use of dialect, although some of its forms differ considerably from standard Japanese. A comparison of works from the 1980s and the 2000s further suggests that the role of dialect in character characterization has been shaped by changing perceptions of regional dialects, including Osaka dialect, as well as the emergence of new models of femininity.

Militarized Shōjo Across Borders: Gendered War Memory in *Kantai Collection* and *Azur Lane*

Sara Morini, Sapienza University of Rome (Italy)

The *kawaii* anthropomorphisation of historical and military objects has become a recognizable convention in contemporary Japanese popular culture, one that has, for instance, feminized tanks (*Girls und Panzer*) and masculinized swords (*Tōken Ranbu*). Within this practice, the reimagining of WWII warships as young women has emerged as a subgenre of video games, inaugurated by *Kantai Collection* (2013) and taken up by other Japanese and Chinese developers. This paper examines *Kantai Collection* alongside *Azur Lane* (2017), one of the most prominent Chinese titles in the subgenre and one whose largest market lies in Japan, to ask how the gendered logic of this convention shifts across borders. Building on Yeo and Weiss's (2022) concept of *kawaii kokutai*,

alongside scholarship on *shōjo* and war memory (Shamoon 2012; Yamamoto 2017; Yoshida and Nagaike 2022), I argue that the two games construct distinct militarized femininities from the same historical archive, revealing how the militarized *shōjo* is transformed through transnational circulation across East Asian media culture. In *Kantai Collection*, ships are framed through familiar, reassuring archetypes — particularly the schoolgirl — within a reverential mnemonic register that incorporates the memory of the Imperial Navy into an intimate, domesticated vision of girlhood. In *Azur Lane*, whose playable factions include the main WWII navies, it is the Japanese ships alone that are associated with supernatural, Shinto-coded iconography — such as fox ears and magatama pendants — which recasts Imperial Japanese femininity as exoticized and mythologized spectacle, one even more overtly sexualized than in *Kantai Collection*. That this Chinese rendering of Imperial Japanese femininity finds its largest audience in Japan suggests that gendered war memory is no longer nationally contained. What travels, then, is the militarized *shōjo* body itself: the medium onto which an imperial past too charged to mourn directly is displaced, exoticized, and now sold back home.

Panel 4: The Life and Work of Haneda Sumiko

(Auto)biography and Women's History in Haneda Sumiko's Independent Cinema

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández, The Japan Society London (UK)

Women's lives, experiences and issues feature prominently in the documentaries directed by Haneda Sumiko, often portrayed from a biographical perspective. Particularly in her post-Iwanami career as an independent filmmaker, Haneda employs the biographical genre as a tool for women's history, aiming to preserve women's stories and to leave a visual trace of their bodies, political commitment, and everyday life. This presentation will examine the biographical and autobiographical aspects of Haneda's cinema, taking as its main object of study *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun: The Life of Hiratsuka Raichō* (*Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta - Hiratsuka Raichō no shōgai*, 2001), read alongside two further independently produced films: *Women's Testimony: Pioneer Women in Labour Movement* (*Onnatachi no shōgen-rōdō undō no naka no senkuteki joseitachi*, 1996) and *Far-Away Home: Lushun and Dalian* (*Haruka naru furusato: Ryojun Dairen*, 2011). I will argue that these films offer a distinct instance of Women's Cinema in Haneda's career, as they document the lives of women as embodied historical subjects and their participation in the history of Japan as a nation. Moreover, they are also testimony of the women's communities, networks, and practices at work in modern and contemporary Japan, including the field of documentary filmmaking. Finally, these films allow us to interrogate the position and authorship of Haneda as a filmmaker, both in terms of gender and national politics.

Women's Voices and Women's Subjectivity in the Documentaries of Haneda Sumiko

Irene González-López, Birkbeck College, University of London (UK)

Haneda Sumiko is one of the most prolific and respected directors of documentary cinema in Japan, and an essential figure in discussing women's cinema in Japan and beyond. She is a

trailblazing woman director who debuted in 1957, directed over 30 documentaries across seven decades, and became a passionate supporter of women's film festivals in Japan since the mid-1980s. Her documentaries explore a great variety of topics, from science films and folk culture to historical memory, women activists and care systems. This paper is concerned with the ways in which Haneda's cinema conveys and emphasises women's subjectivity. Even in the films when women are not the main subject, Haneda's attentive eye draws attention to the distinct gendered experience of ageing, of belonging to a rural community, of surviving conflict, or of making a living as an artist. Women's voices—as on-screen presence and as off-screen voice-over—abound in her documentaries. As her career as independent filmmaker developed, Haneda increased her presence on-screen and performed the narrator's voice-over when, as she declared, "I feel it's a film where I should use my own voice to express my thoughts". Focusing on selected case studies, this paper analyses the use of women's voices in Haneda's cinema to provide insight into her conception of women's subjectivity and authorship. The aim is to demonstrate how Haneda both underscored and challenged social constructions of femininity by employing different modalities of women's voices.