

協研日  
会究本

**Japan Studies Association**

*The Global Network for Expanding Understanding of Japanese Culture*

Thirty-Second Annual  
Japan Studies Association Conference

7-9 January 2026  
The Hyatt Place Waikiki Beach Hotel  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Conference Program Committee**

Dawn Gale , Johnson County Community College  
Andrea Stover, Belmont University  
Jennifer L. Welsh, Eastern New Mexico University

### **Local Arrangements**

Joseph L. Overton, Kapi'olani Community College

### **JSA Executive Board**

President	Joseph L. Overton, Kapi'olani Community College
Vice President	Dawn Gale, Johnson County Community College
Secretary	Michael Charlton, Missouri Western State University
Treasurer	Stacia Bensyl, Missouri Western State University
Member at Large	Andrea Stover, Belmont University
Member at Large	Jennifer L. Welsh, Eastern New Mexico University

**Conference Presentations**  
*All meeting rooms are on the second floor*

**Wednesday, 7 January 2026**

8:30-11:00  
am

**JSA Board Meeting**  
*Room: Lokahi 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor*

11:30-1 pm

**Executive Board Meeting**

2:00-5:00 pm

**Conference registration**  
*Table outside Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor*

5:30-7:00 pm

**Conference meet and greet**  
*Meet in conference hotel reception gallery (in the lobby) for welcome drinks*

7:00-

*Dinner on your own*

**Thursday, 8 January 2026**

8:30am-  
2:30pm

**Conference registration**  
*Table outside Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor*

9:00-9:30

**Opening Remarks, President of JSA Joseph L. Overton**  
*Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor*

9:30-10:30

**Plenary Session**  
*Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor*

**Keynote Presentation: Matt Alt**

**“How the planet’s tastes turned Japanese (and what that means for you)”**

**Manga and anime, video games and virtual idols, City Pop and cozy lit: Japan's pop culture is ascendant around the globe, drawing more attention to the nation than ever before. Japan's "fantasy-industrial complex" produces escapes with planetary pull, but the reasons why they resonate with fans may surprise. In the 1990s and Aughts, Japan got to the future a little ahead of the West, economically, socially, and demographically; the products that it produced began answering questions Western consumers hadn't yet thought to ask. Now, the planet has caught up, and Japan is transforming yet again: from the cutting edge into an unlikely oasis from the ceaseless disruption unfolding in the outside world. Join Matt Alt, author of "Pure Invention: How Japan Made the Modern World" for a presentation and discussion about how the world's tastes turned Japanese -- and what that means for Japan Studies educators going forward.**

10:30-10:45	<i>Coffee/tea break: Outside Pua Melia Ballroom</i>
10:45-12:00	<p><b>Panel 1 Consumerism, Hobbies, and Technology</b>  Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  Chair: Andrea Thimesch</p> <p>Hanae Kramer, University of Hawaii at Manoa, <i>Life in a Bubble: Exploring a Segment of the Japanese Economy from 1986 to 1991</i></p> <p>Robert Curl, Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment, <i>What's Japanese About Japanese Game Preservation? - A Report from the Front Lines of History</i></p>
10:45-12:00	<p><b>Panel 2: Modern Boundaries: Geographical, Political, and Personal</b>  Room: Lokahi 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  Chair: Wade Huntley</p> <p>Seunghyun Kim, Korea University, <i>Divergent Trajectories in Japan's Maritime and Space Securitization: Comparative Analysis of the Basic Act on Ocean Policy and the Basic Space Act</i></p> <p>Kevin Pollack, Kent State University, <i>Strategic Hedging and Middle-Power Autonomy: Japan's Response to the U.S.-China Rivalry</i></p> <p>Toake Endoh, Waseda University, <i>The Nexus Between Populism and Politicization of Immigration in Reiwa Japan</i></p>
12:00-1:15	<i>Lunch on your own</i>
1:15-2:30	<p><b>Panel 3: Literature, Culture, and Violence</b>  Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  Chair: Michael Charlton</p> <p>Veronic Hendrick, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, <i>Murder and Mistrial: The Failure of Law in David Guterson's Snow Falling on Cedars</i></p> <p>Hiroko Saito, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, <i>Shizué Ishimoto's Autobiography and Its Influence on the US-Japan Relationship</i></p> <p>Barbara Seater, Raritan Valley Community College Barbara, <i>The "Comfort Women" and "Comfort Stations": The Sexual Abuse of Women in Fiction, Poetry, and Memoirs</i></p>

1:15-2:30	<p><b>Panel 4: Forests of Memory</b>  <i>Room: Lokahi 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Barbara Lass</i></p> <p>Stacia Bensyl, Missouri Western University, <i>Twenty-first Century Ainu: Reconciling the Past and the Present</i></p> <p>Jennifer Welsh, Eastern New Mexico University, <i>Rich! Exotic! Loyal! and...Hairy?: Kakizaki Hakyō's Portraits of Ainu Chieftains and Perceptions of the Ainu</i></p> <p>Deborah Williams, Johnson County Community College, <i>Toshi Yoshida's Sacred Grove in Twentieth-Century Japanese Visual Culture</i></p>
2:30-2:45	<p><i>Coffee/tea break: Outside Pua Melia Ballroom</i></p>
2:45-4:00	<p><b>Panel 5: Integrating Post Post-War Japan in Comparative Perspective</b>  <i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Eve Blobaum</i></p> <p>Eve Blobaum, Johnson County Community College</p> <p>Stacy Burbidge, Johnson County Community College</p> <p>Peyton Reichert, Johnson County Community College</p> <p>Andrea Thimesch, Johnson County Community College</p>
2:45-4:00	<p><b>Panel 6: Preservation, Remembrance, and Impermanence</b>  <i>Room: Lokahi 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Jennifer L. Welsh</i></p> <p>Gretchen Jude, University of Utah, <i>Understanding Showa Culture Through Kahi Memorial Stelae and Popular Geisha Recordings: Media Materiality for Enlivening Pedagogy</i></p> <p>Victor Xavier Vieira Goulart, University of Colorado Boulder, <i>Sonic Impermanence and Disaster: Async as Musical Response to Post-3.11 Japan</i></p> <p>Michael Giammasi, Thomas Jefferson University, <i>Quiet Instruments: The Stone and Water Works at Noguchi's Chase Manhattan Bank Sunken Garden and Its Effects on Public Health and Social Welfare</i></p>

<b>Friday, 9 January 2026</b>	
8:30-9:45	<p><b>Plenary Session</b>  <i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Keynote Presentation: Matt Alt, Dr. Alisa Freedman, Dr. Bill Tsutsui</b>  <b>“Japanese Popular Culture Studies: Perspectives from the Field”</b></p> <p><b>Our panel will discuss the past, present, and future of the field of Japanese popular culture studies from various perspective, including those of journalists and insiders in Japan's culture industries, researchers, teachers, project leaders, editors, and fans. Topics include major developments and turning points in the field, changes in access and globalization, and rewards and challenges of teaching and researching Japanese popular culture.</b></p>
9:45-10:00	<i>Coffee/tea break: Outside Pua Melia Ballroom</i>
10:00-11:15	<p><b>Panel 7: Japanese Studies in Transition: Engaging Post-Postwar Japan through Law and Education</b>  <i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Stacia Bensyl</i></p> <p>Brandon Marc Higa, Kapi'olani Community College, <i>Bridging Law and International Relations: Expanding the Pedagogical Horizons of Japanese Studies in a Shifting Higher Education Landscape</i></p> <p>James Parker, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, <i>Unlearning Assumptions, Learning Connections: Japanese Studies for Interdependent Futures</i></p> <p>Discussants:  Professor Mark Levin, Director, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa</p> <p>Dr. Joan Pan, Associate Director, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa</p>
10:00-11:15	<p><b>Panel 8: Battles and Bandits: Shaping Media and Morale</b>  <i>Room: Lokahi 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Jennifer L. Welsh</i></p> <p>Lun Jing, Leiden University, <i>The “zeroth” Kōhaku Utagassen: NHK, SCAP, and the 1945 Red and White Music Match</i></p> <p>Michael Charlton, Missouri Western State University, <i>Robin Hood of Japan: Ishikawa Goemon and the Bandit Myth</i></p>

11:15-12:00	<p><b>Plenary JSA Membership Meeting</b>  <b>Everyone is welcome</b></p> <p><i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i>  <i>Chair: Joseph Overton, JSA President</i></p>
12:00-1:15	Lunch on your own

1:15-2:30	<p><b>Plenary Panel</b>  <i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1950s Japanese Culture and Its Legacies:  Dr. Alisa Freedman, Dr. Jayson Chun, Scott Kikkawa  “Music, Mobility, and Cultural Exchange”</b></p>
2:30-2:45	<i>Coffee/tea break: Outside Pua Melia Ballroom</i>
2:45-4:00	<p><b>Plenary Session</b>  <i>Room: Pua Melia Ballroom, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor</i></p> <p><b>Special Panel on Japanese Baseball in Memory of Dr. Paul Dunscomb</b></p> <p>Barbara Lass, City College of San Francisco, <i>The Samurai Sword and the Baseball Bat: Anthropological Perspectives on the Role of ‘Samurai Culture’ in Japanese Baseball</i></p> <p>Wade Huntley, Naval Postgraduate School, <i>From Oh to Ohtani: Evolution of the Interactions of Japanese and U.S. Professional Baseball</i></p>
4:15	<i>Special Announcement &amp; Film Discussion w/Dr. Bill Tsutsui</i>

## Keynote Speakers



Matt Alt is a Tokyo-based writer, translator, and co-founder of the entertainment localization company AltJapan Co. Ltd. For more than twenty years, he helped top Japanese video game, manga, anime, and toy creators bring their visions to global audiences. Today, he uses that long experience inside Japan's "fantasy-industrial complex" to bring a unique perspective to world events. Matt co-hosted NHK World's award-winning *Japanology Plus* television series from 2015 to 2022. He is a co-author (with Hiroko Yoda) of *Yokai Attack: The Japanese Monster Survival Guide* (2011, Tuttle) and the author of *Pure Invention: How Japan's Pop Culture Conquered the World* (2020, Crown). His writing can be found in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Slate*, *Wired*, and more.

---



Dr. Jayson M Chun is a Professor of History at the University of Hawaii – West O'ahu, where he specializes in East Asian popular culture and the transnational history of entertainment across the Asia-Pacific region. His research examines how popular culture crosses borders and connects audiences throughout Asia and beyond. He is the author of *A Nation of a Hundred Million Idiots?: A Social History of Japanese Television 1953 – 1973*, a book on Japanese television and has published articles on J-pop and K-pop. He is the co-editor of *The Pop Pacific* (<https://blog.ias.asia/pop-pacific>), a blog dedicated to transnational popular culture.

---



Dr. Alisa Freedman is a professor of Japanese literature, cultural studies, and gender at the University of Oregon. Her books include *Japan on American TV*; *Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road*; *Women in Japanese Studies: Memoirs from a Trailblazing Generation* (a collection of 32 memoirs); *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture* (an edited textbook featuring 42 trends); an annotated

translation of Kawabata Yasunari's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*; and *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan* (a co-edited volume). She has published numerous articles for academic and general interest publications, literary translations, and academic skills guides. She is the Faculty Fellow of a residence hall and enjoys presenting at cultural festivals, anime cons, reading groups, and other public events.



Scott Kikkawa is the author of *Kona Winds*, *Red Dirt*, *Char Siu* and *Sporting Girl* (forthcoming in 2026), all from Bamboo Ridge Press, noir detective novels set in postwar Honolulu. He has contributed to Akashic Books' *Honolulu Noir* anthology (Chris McKinney, editor). His short stories have appeared in *Bamboo Ridge: The Journal of Hawai'i Literature and Arts*, the Colin Conway-edited anthology *A Bag of Dick's* and the Frank Zafiro-edited anthology *Tattered Blue Line*. His essays have appeared in *The Hawai'i Review of Books* and *Kyoto Journal*. Kikkawa has been honored with an Elliot Cades Award for Literature, and his short story "Joe Sukiyaki" from *A Bag of Dick's* was selected as one of the "Other Distinguished Stories of 2021" in the 2022 *Best American Mysteries and Suspense* anthology. His first two novels, *Kona Winds* and *Red Dirt*, are among *Honolulu Magazine's* "Essential Hawai'i Books You Should Read: The Next 134". His work was recommended in the 2024 *New York Times* piece "Read Your Way Through Hawai'i." He is a columnist and associate editor for *The Hawai'i Review of Books*. Currently a federal law enforcement officer, the New York University alumnus lives with his family in Honolulu.



Dr. Bill Tsutsui is Chancellor and Professor of History at Ottawa University. He is the author of *Manufacturing Ideology: Scientific Management in Twentieth-Century Japan*, *Banking Policy in Japan: American Efforts at Reform During the Occupation*, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, and *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization*, as well as numerous essays on modern Japanese history. He has also edited *Banking in Japan*, *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage* (with Michiko Ito), *A Companion to Japanese History*, *The East Asian Olympiads, 1934-2008: Building Bodies and Nations in Japan, Korea, and China* (with Michael Baskett), and *Oceanic Japan: The Archipelago in Pacific and Global History* (with Stefan Huebner, Nadin Hee, and Ian Jared Miller). Dr. Tsutsui serves on the boards of the Association for Asian Studies, the US-Japan Council, and the Japan-US Bridging Foundation. In 2020 he was appointed a Commissioner of the Japan-US Friendship Commission and a Panelist on CULCON (the US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange). In 2020-2021, he was the Edwin O. Reischauer Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies and the Department of East Asian Languages & Civilizations at Harvard University.

## Presentation Abstracts

**Stacia Bensyl, Missouri Western University** [bensyl@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:bensyl@missouriwestern.edu)

*Twenty-first Century Ainu: Reconciling the Past and the Present*

**Eve Blobaum, Johnson County Community College** [eblobaum@jccc.edu](mailto:eblobaum@jccc.edu)

*Integrating Post Post-War Japan in Comparative Perspective*

This interdisciplinary panel considers modern Japan in comparative perspective, offering avenues for examination of cultural norms and social institutions within the classroom. Through an exploration of such diverse topics as kakeibo, manga and anime consumption, nursing homes, and race, our discussion will consider broad themes such as collective capitalism, family systems, and social change in post post-war Japan and offer ideas for integrating Japan Studies content into undergraduate courses, extending to disciplines such as literature, information science, business, social science, and beyond.

**Stacy Burbidge, Johnson County Community College** [sburbidg@jccc.edu](mailto:sburbidg@jccc.edu)

*Integrating Post Post-War Japan in Comparative Perspective*

This interdisciplinary panel considers modern Japan in comparative perspective, offering avenues for examination of cultural norms and social institutions within the classroom. Through an exploration of such diverse topics as kakeibo, manga and anime consumption, nursing homes, and race, our discussion will consider broad themes such as collective capitalism, family systems, and social change in post post-war Japan and offer ideas for integrating Japan Studies content into undergraduate courses, extending to disciplines such as literature, information science, business, social science, and beyond.

**Michael Charlton, Missouri Western State University** [mcharlton@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mcharlton@missouriwestern.edu)

*Robin Hood of Japan: Ishikawa Goemon and the Bandit Myth*

If you Google “Robin Hood of Japan” you will receive dozens of results for one person: Ishikawa Goemon, a 16th century bandit who supposedly robbed from the rich to give to the poor and attempted to assassinate Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Goemon is a quasi-historical figure with a few vague contemporary references to back up his existence but most of his later reputation and popularity are based on much later and wildly contradictory accounts. Much like Jesse James of Missouri or Joaquin Murrieta of Mexico, Goemon seems to have started his historical existence as a thief only to become a more noble figure in legend. Popular as a character in kabuki, Goemon himself has featured in films, anime, manga, and even postage stamps and has inspired other characters. This presentation would explore the legend of Goemon and his many and changing representations in media, including how these fit British historian Eric Hobsbawm’s historical and structuralist reading of bandit myths. However, it will also question the label “Robin Hood of Japan” and the European framework placed on this myth, much as scholar Minsoo Kang has questioned the applicability of calling the legendary bandit Hong Gildong the “Robin Hood of Korea.”

**Robert Curl, Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment** [rob.curl@themade.org](mailto:rob.curl@themade.org)

*What’s Japanese About Japanese Game Preservation? - A Report from the Front Lines of History*

Japan looms large in video games. Birthed late-Showa, Japanese companies ascended to global dominance in Heisei and Reiwa. While American companies provide cell phones and platforms from Youtube to Substack, the top two game hardware makers in the world have been Japanese since the mid-1980s.

As we move further into Reiwa, many look to Japan’s gaming past for everything from inspiration and comfort to commerce. Yet, because of how quickly technology changed, the difference between 1989 and 2019 can feel like eons. Computer graphics went from basic sprites to life-like models, while the internet made gaming mainstream. 1990’s hardware is now so alien, it doesn’t work with modern equipment. With these difficulties, how do people “touch” this past literally and figuratively? How do they view early Heisei, especially if they weren’t alive then?

Furthermore, how do institutions “remember” video games and why does the Japanese government want a museum exhibiting Super Mario Bros to register under the same law as a soapland or strip club?

This presentation will cover fieldwork done in 2024 and 2025, including site visits with Japanese and American heritage institutions, preservation societies, conferences, and trade shows. It will also serve as an overview of the challenges the field of game studies faces, especially the loss of historical material, the sometimes frustrating regulatory framework software preservationists and game developers must operate under, and pieces of old technology that often literally explode.

**Toake Endoh, Waseda University** [toake@aoni.waseda.jp](mailto:toake@aoni.waseda.jp)

*The Nexus Between Populism and Politicization of Immigration in Reiwa Japan*

This paper explores the nexus between populism and politicization of immigration in Reiwa Japan. Rising hard-right populism in the country is a new political development, as evidenced in the Upper House (in July 2025) and other elections. Central to their political discourse is immigration, or “gaikokujin mondai (problems associated with foreigners).” Right-leaning political parties, both the established, such as the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Japan Innovation Party, and newcomers, represented by Sanseito, demonize immigrants/foreigners as “threats” and offer protection to the ‘people’ (or ‘nihinjin’). Politicization of immigration and raw attacks on ethnic ‘others’ against are rather unorthodox in Japanese politics, where immigration policy, either acceptance or control, has been ‘depoliticized’ and monopolized by immigration bureaucrats and neoliberal politicians. How is immigration framed in the recent populist discourse? How do the Japanese ‘citizens’ respond to the populist appeals? How does politicization of immigration affect the national policy? And how should we understand Japan’s populism against immigration in the contemporary global context? This paper grapples with these questions, qualitatively analyzing public policy and political discourse on immigration, especially immigration control. Theoretically, the study draws from “populism as political style” and “performance of crisis” from comparative perspectives (Moffett 2014, 2015). I will examine the UK for comparison since its performative populism vilifying immigration is thrusting the xenophobic Reform Party to the center stage. I hope that this paper provides an insight for predicting the future trajectory of immigration policy and politics of the diversifying Reiwa Japan.

**Michael Giammasi, Thomas Jefferson University** [michael.giammasi@students.jefferson.edu](mailto:michael.giammasi@students.jefferson.edu)

*Quiet Instruments: The Stone and Water Works at Noguchi’s Chase Manhattan Bank Sunken Garden and Its Effects on Public Health and Social Welfare*

This paper analyzes the Japanese lens of Modernist landscape architecture, presenting Isamu Noguchi’s Chase Manhattan Sunken Garden as a deliberately healthful public room. Circular plan, lowered section, and seasonal water manage attention, comfort, and microclimate, while precise stone fields support social welfare and ecological performance. I trace how this corporate plaza operates as everyday infrastructure for rest, encounter, and thermal relief; connect its tactics to later privately-owned public spaces and campus courts; and outline retrofit strategies for climate smart plazas. Finally, I present brief takeaways on avenues for continued analysis within Japanese architecture and design.

**Victor Xavier Vieira Goulart, University of Colorado Boulder** [Victor.XavierVieiraGoulart@colorado.edu](mailto:Victor.XavierVieiraGoulart@colorado.edu)

*Sonic Impermanence and Disaster: Async as Musical Response to Post-3.11 Japan*

The final decade of Heisei Japan witnessed the unprecedented 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (Higashi Nihon Daishinsai), which marked a collective moment of trauma through the triple tragedies of earthquake, tsunami, and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. While responses to these events have been widely explored in literature (DiNitto, 2019), the role of musical responses remains understudied. This paper examines how composer, environmentalist, and anti-nuclear activist Ryuichi Sakamoto employs musical elements and sound design in his 2017 album Async—including field recordings, traditional Japanese instruments, and an out-of-tune piano that survived the Tohoku disaster—to address environmental anxieties, impermanence, mortality, nature, and trauma. By analyzing three interrelated multimedia works—the conceptual album Async (2017), the documentary Ryuichi Sakamoto: CODA (2017), and the concert film Async Live at the Park Avenue Armory (2018)—this research explores how Sakamoto connects Japanese aesthetic concepts and the principle of asynchrony to the sonic representation of impermanence and resilience. I argue that Sakamoto’s approach transforms ambient and

electronic sounds into a medium for existential and environmental reflection and healing, deeply entwined with cultural memory after the triple disaster in Heisei Japan.

**Veronic Hendrick, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY** [vhendrick@jj.cuny.edu](mailto:vhendrick@jj.cuny.edu)  
*Murder and Mistril: The Failure of Law in David Guterson's Snow Falling on Cedars*

Reading Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* through the lens of Literature and Law yields a problematic, yet compelling, rendering of the legacy of World War II and the racism it (re)engendered. Past and present blend through storytelling and courtroom testimony. Flashbacks and witness statements recount both the experiences of Japanese-Americans and their movement to internment camps, specifically Manzanar, as well as their experiences in fighting in Europe during the war. The novel has been criticized as being an apologia that seeks "to absolve Americans for their unconstitutional wartime misdeeds" (Austin, 1) as well as creating a method of whitewashing racism. Nonetheless, this paper explores the ways Guterson's novel brings needed attention to the methods with which law was used to support anti-Japanese sentiment during and long after the war.

**Brandon Marc Higa, Kapi'olani Community College** [higabran@hawaii.edu](mailto:higabran@hawaii.edu)  
*Bridging Law and International Relations: Expanding the Pedagogical Horizons of Japanese Studies in a Shifting Higher Education Landscape*

Japanese Studies has historically drawn strength from the humanities and social sciences—fields that have long served as gateways to intercultural understanding. Yet, as higher education undergoes realignment under economic and political pressures, Japanese Studies faces an urgent need to redefine its pedagogical and institutional relevance. This presentation explores how integrating perspectives from law and international relations can expand the scope and vitality of Japanese Studies programs.

Through the lens of Japan's evolving legal and geopolitical environment, the session proposes new pathways for curricular innovation and student engagement. Topics include constitutional interpretation and human rights debates in Japan, the legal dimensions of U.S.–Japan security relations, and the emergence of national security law as a transdisciplinary bridge between traditional area studies and applied professional education. These intersections not only deepen students' cultural literacy but also prepare them for diverse career trajectories in diplomacy, governance, and policy analysis.

Amid declining federal support for the humanities under shifting U.S. administrations, Japanese Studies must adapt to broader institutional imperatives emphasizing workforce development and public impact. By reframing legal and international studies as integral to Japan-focused education, this paper argues for a strategic repositioning of the field—one that preserves its humanistic core while aligning with contemporary academic and societal needs.

**Wade Huntley, Naval Postgraduate School** [wlhuntley@gmail.com](mailto:wlhuntley@gmail.com)  
*From Oh to Ohtani: Evolution of the Interactions of Japanese and U.S. Professional Baseball*

This paper will evaluate the parallel roles that baseball has played in the economic and cultural experiences of Japan and the United States since the Second World War (latter-Shōwa and Heisei periods). The evaluation will build foundationally on Paul Dunscumb's *The Crisis in Pro Baseball and Japan's Lost Decade: The Curious Resilience of Heisei Japan* (2024), which examines the convulsion engulfing Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) in the social and economic context of the "Lost Decade" of the Heisei period. Drawing on other sources, the evaluation then will juxtapose contemporaneous challenges faced by U.S. Major League Baseball (MLB) in its own social and economic context. The evaluation aims not only to compare and contrast the two experiences, but to spotlight in what ways the growing interactions of the two baseball ecosystems express the ongoing evolution of the relationship between the two countries.

**Lun Jing, Leiden University** [jingl@vuw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:jingl@vuw.leidenuniv.nl)  
*The "zeroth" Kōhaku Utagassen: NHK, SCAP, and the 1945 Red and White Music Match*

This paper investigates the historical details and the sociocultural significance of the Red and White Music Match (kōhaku ongaku jiai), a one-off radio music program broadcast live by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (Nippon

Hōsō Kyōkai/NHK) on December 31, 1945. Known as the prototype of the NHK Red and White Song Battle (kōhaku utagassen), one of Japan's longest-running and most-watched TV programmes, the Red and White Music Match was produced by NHK's Music Department in order to boost the morale of the listeners throughout Japan and relieve their pressure derived from wartime hardship.

The original program plan of the Music Match, which titled the special "Red and White Song Battle"/Kōhaku Utagassen, went under the censorship of the Civil Information and Educational Section (CIE), a division subordinate to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), and was turned down relentlessly. CIE was responsible for supervising, and essentially in many cases censoring media and educational content in Japan to ensure that the cultural products and publications were aligned with the American Occupation objectives of democratization and demilitarization, and it turned out that CIE deemed the title "Song Battle" inappropriate as they regarded it as suggesting support for warfare and therefore militarism. Seeing this, NHK renamed the programme "Red and White Music Match" to dispel the misunderstandings, and the modified plan was narrowly approved. Eventually, the year-end music special received an enthusiastic welcome from listeners and laid the foundations for the future long-standing "Song Battle" that gradually developed to an annual national media event.

Setting this naming incident as the central point of analysis, this paper illuminates the role of CIE-SCAP played in Japan's early postwar broadcasting scenes, thereby offering insight into the American influence on Japan's broadcasting activities as well as that on the content and formality of mass cultural production during the Allied Occupation period. Furthermore, in accordance with the theme of this conference, this paper sheds light on the representation of and reference to the 1945 Red and White Music Match in the 21st century, typically through the special TV drama *Kōhaku ga umareta hi* (The Birthday of the Red and White) produced by NHK and broadcast on March 21, 2015, from which inspirations regarding how Showa has been embodied and navigated (especially) in the late Heisei period on the continuum of "Kōhaku" can be drawn.

**Gretchen Jude, University of Utah [g.jude@utah.edu](mailto:g.jude@utah.edu)**

*Understanding Showa Culture Through Kahi Memorial Stelae and Popular Geisha Recordings: Media Materiality for Enlivening Pedagogy*

Although the long Showa era ended two generations ago, its influence remains palpable today. This presentation explores two tangible legacies of the period: recordings by geisha media stars and stone memorials (歌碑 kahi) dedicated to their once-popular songs. I argue that these artifacts offer valuable tools for teaching cultural history, providing students with embodied, concrete connections to the past that reveal how history persists into the present.

The early-to-mid 20th century saw a global explosion of mass media – phonographs, film, radio, and television – giving us an unprecedented window into that era. Today, platforms like YouTube make these recordings widely accessible. Yet without historical and cultural context, such materials are easily misunderstood. Inexperienced viewers often impose contemporary assumptions on their viewing, leading to anachronistic interpretations.

Focusing on the geisha kashu (芸者歌手) – traditionally-trained recording artists who popularized early mass medias – curricula can present a wide range of historical themes through listening to the music of the time and critically examining the lyrics. These women were pioneers of phonograph, radio, and film, later reappearing on nostalgic TV shows as musical tastes shifted to Anglo-American styles. Their careers offer insights into evolving gender roles throughout the Showa period, and their songs provide a rich record of early Japanese popular culture.

At the same time, the ancient tradition of inscribed stone memorials saw a revival in the post-war period. A practice originally imported from China, the placing of lyric stones carved with stylized calligraphy proliferated across Japan – to the extent that these monuments often go unnoticed in everyday landscapes. This paper highlights the postwar stellae dedicated to geisha songs, many placed at tourist sites tied to significant events. These stones literally situate historical memory in place, preserving voices from the past within the modern landscape.

Finally, in this presentation, examples of both the Showa song stellae and the geisha phonographic recordings (as

well as film and other media artifacts) will be detailed as potential teaching materials for engaging students of modern Japanese history – as an instance in which women’s words were literally written in stone.

**Seunghyun Kim, Korea University** [ae85maru@korea.ac.kr](mailto:ae85maru@korea.ac.kr)

*Divergent Trajectories in Japan’s Maritime and Space Securitization: Comparative Analysis of the Basic Act on Ocean Policy and the Basic Space Act*

Japan’s maritime and space domains have undergone asymmetric evolution. This stems from escalating security threats—such as China’s assertive maritime claims and North Korea’s missile tests—coupled with rapid technological shifts, where security normalization advances selectively across sectors. I comparatively analyze the Basic Act on Ocean Policy (BAOP, 2007) and Basic Space Act (BSA, 2008), enacted under Japan’s constitutional and administrative framework yet yielding opposing outcomes: de-securitization in the BAOP, which frames oceans as domains of “safety (安全),” and securitization in the BSA, which reinterprets “peaceful use” as “non-aggressive” to legitimize defense applications.

Integrating Securitization Theory with Historical Institutionalism, I employ process tracing of primary sources—including legislative debates, official reports, and legal documents—to trace how institutional legacies and actor compositions shaped divergent security framing across the maritime and space domains, while situating external shocks as contextual triggers rather than primary causes.

Findings reveal asymmetric institutional evolution, challenging monolithic interpretations of Japan’s evolving security identity. Specifically, the maritime sector institutionalizes safety and environmental norms (e.g., BAOP’s emphasis on comprehensive resource management), while the space sector accommodates defense industry-led technologies through legal reinterpretation (e.g., BSA’s integration of satellite surveillance for missile defense). This contrast illustrates how Japan’s policy subsystems—shaped by domain-specific institutional legacies—evolve at uneven speeds and along distinct paths under the same constitutional pacifism, where pacifist norms constrain maritime militarization more than space’s technological alignments.

Theoretically, this “sectoral securitization path” framework extends intra-state variation analyses, offering insights into fragmented normalization in Northeast Asia. Empirically, it highlights policy implications for Japan’s strategic domains, urging nuanced engagement with its evolving security posture.

**Hanae Kramer, University of Hawaii at Manoa** [hanae@hawaii.edu](mailto:hanae@hawaii.edu)

*Life in a Bubble: Exploring a Segment of the Japanese Economy from 1986 to 1991*

Japanese consumerism during the so-called “bubble economy” (1986-1991) was marked by people’s irrational exuberance and the surge of excessive consumption it inspired. This phenomenon manifested in both obvious and subtle ways, including the dramatic rise of niche hobbies that reflected the consumer zeitgeist and Japan’s economic conditions of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Extravagant pastimes offer a window into a heretofore understudied aspect of Japanese culture. For reasons of scope and manageability, content will be restricted to the hobbyist segment of the consumer electronics sector. The sources that inform this paper—especially the periodicals—supply novel perspectives from which to view this dynamic period of Japanese history that, in turn, offers new insights into a time and culture that have profoundly shaped the perceptions of material success and left significant cultural aftereffects.

**Barbara Lass, City College of San Francisco** [blass@ccsf.edu](mailto:blass@ccsf.edu)

*The Samurai Sword and the Baseball Bat: Anthropological Perspectives on the Role of ‘Samurai Culture’ in Japanese Baseball*

Using concepts from cultural anthropology and specifically the “anthropology of sport”, this paper examines competing points of view on whether and to what extent “samurai culture” has influenced Japanese baseball. The paper briefly outlines the history and distinctive nature of baseball in Japan. Then two well known ideas regarding “samurai baseball” are assessed. Specifically, they include Robert Whiting’s hypothesis that Japanese baseball embodies key elements of bushido or the “way of the warrior” and anthropologist William W. Kelly’s suggestion that the unique nature of Japanese baseball is due to different and less dramatic aspects of Japanese society and

culture. The paper concludes with a discussion of larger issues related to this topic including whether the concept of “national identity” or “national character” is useful or valid.

**James Parker, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa** [parker39@hawaii.edu](mailto:parker39@hawaii.edu)

*Unlearning Assumptions, Learning Connections: Japanese Studies for Interdependent Futures*

This talk draws on research and fieldwork in Japan to explore how Japanese studies can move beyond textbooks and classrooms to shape the way we see and connect with the world. Rather than treating Japan and East Asia as a distant object of study, it highlights the importance of unlearning assumptions and cultivating relationships that reveal the region's complexity and interdependence. Through examples from research on Japanese education, human rights frameworks, and everyday encounters during two years of fieldwork in Kyoto, this presentation highlights how the study of Japan can help us think in new ways, beyond familiar boundaries, and how its insights can inform our lives and communities in an interconnected world. In doing so, Japanese studies opens fresh possibilities of approaching global challenges, from intercultural understanding to climate change, by reframing the field as a dialogic practice grounded in relational ontologies rather than one way norm transmission.

**Kevin Pollack, Kent State University** [Kevintpollack@gmail.com](mailto:Kevintpollack@gmail.com)

*Strategic Hedging and Middle-Power Autonomy: Japan's Response to the U.S.-China Rivalry*

This paper analyzes the foreign policy conduct of Japan in 2020-2025 in the midst of the growing strategic rivalry between China and the United States, and the question of whether Japan is acting as a strategic hedger, balancer, or bandwagoner. Being a middle power with deep security interdependence to the United States and prominent levels of economic interdependence with China, Japan faces a complex policy dilemma in the middle of world governance and Indo-Pacific conditions. This study relies on a qualitative research approach with the incorporation of hedging theory as the primary association to understand the research topic; the development of the concept of the National Security Strategy (2022) and Diplomatic Bluebook (2023) to be applied in Japan and supported with peer-reviewed research on the same subject and the regional studies. This analysis examines three strategic areas (1) security policy and defense cooperation as evidenced by the Quad alliance; (2) economic diplomacy as evidenced by membership in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and relations with China (3) diplomatic action with regard to the dispute of the Senkaku Islands. Results show that Japan acts in a hybridized form of hedging policy consisting of both deterrence by forming alliances with Washington and rational economic interaction with Beijing. This dual-track strategy contributes to the increased strategic independence of Japan, stability in its regional policies, and a contribution to the rule of global governance without the need to align itself fully with either of the two powers. The paper is relevant to the overall body of literature on middle-power diplomacy as it shows how Japan uses hedging as a form of adaptation to multipolar competition and global order.

**Peyton Reichert, Johnson County Community College** [preicher@jccc.edu](mailto:preicher@jccc.edu)

*Integrating Post Post-War Japan in Comparative Perspective*

This interdisciplinary panel considers modern Japan in comparative perspective, offering avenues for examination of cultural norms and social institutions within the classroom. Through an exploration of such diverse topics as kakeibo, manga and anime consumption, nursing homes, and race, our discussion will consider broad themes such as collective capitalism, family systems, and social change in post post-war Japan and offer ideas for integrating Japan Studies content into undergraduate courses, extending to disciplines such as literature, information science, business, social science, and beyond.

**Hiroko Saito, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa** [hirokos9@hawaii.edu](mailto:hirokos9@hawaii.edu)

*Shizué Ishimoto's Autobiography and Its Influence on the US-Japan Relationship*

This paper investigates the agency of Japanese women in the pre-World War II US-Japan relationship and its ramifications in the post-war era through an examination of *Facing Two Ways*, an English autobiography of Shidzué Ishimoto (1897-2001)—later known as Shidzué Katō—published in 1935. Ishimoto was a Japanese feminist who was dubbed “the Margaret Sanger of Japan” for her pioneering work in promoting birth control and is

recognized for her lifelong commitment to the expansion and liberation of women's rights in Japan. Furthermore, she was recognized as a leading Japanese activist in the United States by the end of World War II, prompting GHQ to encourage her to run for the House of Representatives in 1946, an election which she subsequently won. In this paper, I will examine how Ishimoto negotiated national and international situations in the 1930s, focusing on her self-representation in *Facing Two Ways* toward American audience, along with its reception in the United States, to argue that the way she navigated Japan's image in her English autobiography impacted the post-war US-Japan alliance.

**Barbara Seater, Raritan Valley Community College** [Barbara.Seater@raritanval.edu](mailto:Barbara.Seater@raritanval.edu)

*The "Comfort Women" and "Comfort Stations": The Sexual Abuse of Women in Fiction, Poetry, and Memoirs*

The use of foreign women by the Japanese military in World War II came to light in the 1980s when "comfort women" in South Korea began to speak about their experiences, but it was not until 1991 when three Korean women filed a class action suit against the Japanese government. Many historians have documented the treatment and experiences of comfort women, while less is known is the use of "comfort stations" by the American military in Japan in the early days of the occupation of Japan. While history can provide us with an analysis of past events through facts, context, and interpretation, while literature informs us with an empathetic understanding of the lives of the men and women who experienced the sexual abuse. This paper will compare fiction and poetry to the memoirs of victims.

**Andrea Thimesch, Johnson County Community College** [athimesc@jccc.edu](mailto:athimesc@jccc.edu)

*Integrating Post Post-War Japan in Comparative Perspective*

This interdisciplinary panel considers modern Japan in comparative perspective, offering avenues for examination of cultural norms and social institutions within the classroom. Through an exploration of such diverse topics as kakeibo, manga and anime consumption, nursing homes, and race, our discussion will consider broad themes such as collective capitalism, family systems, and social change in post post-war Japan and offer ideas for integrating Japan Studies content into undergraduate courses, extending to disciplines such as literature, information science, business, social science, and beyond.

**Jennifer L. Welsh, Eastern New Mexico University** [jennifer.welsh@enmu.edu](mailto:jennifer.welsh@enmu.edu)

*Rich! Exotic! Loyal! and...Hairy?: Kakizaki Hakyō's Portraits of Ainu Chieftains and Perceptions of the Ainu*

The *Ishū Retsuzō*, a set of portraits of Ainu chieftains (and one of their mothers) who had supported the Matsumae during the 1789 Menashi-Kunashir rebellion, was created by Matsumae retainer and artist Kakizaki Hakyō shortly after the rebellion had been put down. One of the most important examples of Ainu genre painting, it was not only presented to the Emperor, but also reprinted, copied, and excerpted in later works over the following century. The portraits present the Ainu as connected to larger international trade routes, most notably through wearing rich Chinese silk brocades, and having access to a wide range of natural resources from Hokkaido itself. At the same time, the artist highlights the exotic qualities of the "hairy" Ainu. In this paper, I will use this set of portraits to examine Ainu genre painting and Ainu culture. This will include the Tokugawa-era context of producing and reproducing this set of images, as well as how traditional Ainu clothing and accessories appear or are presented in the twenty-first century context of cultural revival, pop culture, and historical preservation.

**Deborah Williams, Johnson County Community College** [dwilli63@jccc.edu](mailto:dwilli63@jccc.edu)

*Toshi Yoshida's Sacred Grove in Twentieth-Century Japanese Visual Culture*

In a recent publication, I argue that Toshi Yoshida's woodblock print, *Kami no Mori* ("Sacred Grove"), 1941, is best understood and appreciated from the perspective of romantic nationalism. During this period, many Japanese artists were co-opted by the state to produce *saikan hokoku*, or "art in the service of the war." At the same time, the Japanese Romantic School was emphasizing the renunciation of modernity and a return to classical Japan by attempting to resurrect cultural and ethnic foundations on which to build a new Japanese national identity. *Sacred Grove* was arguably part of that effort. This can be demonstrated by juxtaposing it with Hokusai's iconic *Kanagawa-oki Nami Ura* ("The Great Wave off Kanagawa"), 1831. The wave has been asserted to represent the

irresistible force of foreigners and foreign influence on Japan, threatening to inundate and wash away traditional Japanese society and culture. In contrast, the viewpoint in Sacred Grove is looking into sacred and secluded core space, and the shrine among the towering trees is a metaphor for the endurance and solidity of traditional Japanese culture in the face of external influence. In that light, Yoshida's print reflects a radical shift in the Japanese self-image in that it conveys a message of strength and inspiration from the ancient, enduring, unifying, and immovable object of divine origin supporting and defending Nihon and the "Children of the Sun."