



universität
wien

TOSHIBA
Toshiba International Foundation



Department of
East Asian Studies
Japanese Studies



Childcare Provision and the Desire for Motherhood in the Era of a Shrinking Japan

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Chigusa Yamaura

Thursday
2025-04-10
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



Photo by Pieterjan
Vandaele - CC-BY 2.0



<https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/ujapanlectures>



Childcare Provision and the Desire for Motherhood in the Era of a Shrinking Japan

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Chigusa Yamaura

Thursday
2025-04-10
18⁰⁰~19³⁰

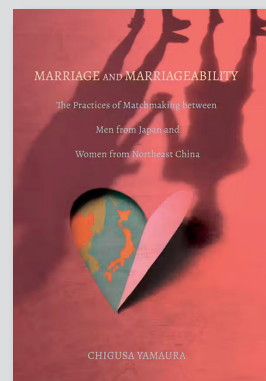
Shōshi kōreka (,low birth rate and ageing population) is a phrase that has become ubiquitous in the everyday political and social landscape of Japan, acting as a shorthand for a whole range of anxieties and concerns. Much political, public and academic attention has been devoted to analysing the causes and possible solutions to the shrinking population. This lecture also addresses Japan's demographic crisis. However, rather than offering solutions or exploring the causes, I would like to offer a different approach. In this talk, I will ask how Japan's 'demographic crisis' functions as a cultural discourse, a set of narratives, and a form of governmentality that intersects with and shapes how people within Japanese society navigate their engagement as civil society actors, their sense of

Japanese identity, and even their intimate lives and desires.

The first part of the talk will address how the discourses of demographic crisis have become a hegemonic cultural narrative. The second part of the talk will focus on a specific issue - childcare provision - to analyse the changing rhetoric, meanings and experiences of working mothers against an evolving social, economic and demographic backdrop. I will show that while the idea of women's liberation was the starting point for expanding childcare provision, it is framed today as the liberation of women's (presumed) desire for motherhood in the context of the demographic crisis. Ultimately, the talk aims to rethink the role of the demographic crisis narrative in contemporary Japanese society.



Chigusa Yamaura is sociocultural anthropologist and currently a Departmental Lecturer at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford. She is the author of *Marriage and Marriageability: The Practices of Matchmaking between Men from Japan and Women from Northeast China* (Cornell University Press 2020). Her work addresses a broad array of topics, including gender, marriage, cross-border marriage, family, life course expectations, motherhood, reproduction, childcare, and fertility as well as migration, colonial memory, and transnationalism in East Asia. Her current research examines shifting conceptions of motherhood against the backdrop of demographic change in Japan. Her most recent publications are „The Cultural Politics of Childcare Provision in the Era of a Shrinking Japan“ from *Critical Asian Studies* (2020) and “An Imagined Shrinking Community: Japanese Nationalism and the Chronology of the Future” from *Japanese Studies* (2024).



<https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/ujapanlectures>
ujapanlectures.ostasien@univie.ac.at