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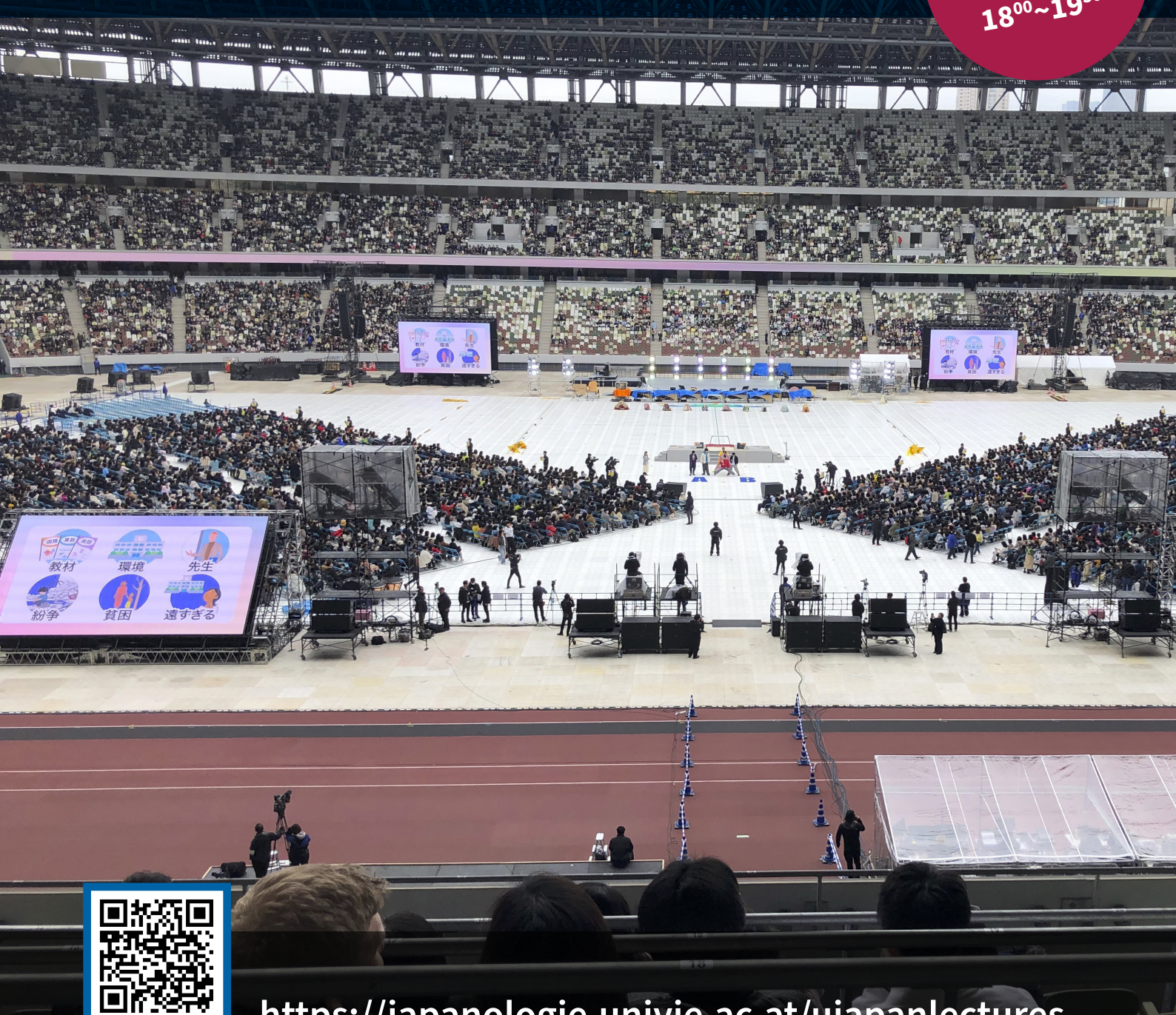
Department of
East Asian Studies
Japanese Studies



Carnivorism as a Silenced Sacrifice of the Future: Japanese youths “being political” and “causing *meiwaku*” in the Capitalocene

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen

Thursday
2026-03-19
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



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Carnivorism as a Silenced Sacrifice of the Future: Japanese youths “being political” and “causing *meiwaku*” in the Capitalocene

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Two issues are essential to prevent catastrophic climate breakdown – keep fossil fuel in the ground and significantly reduce industrialised animal agriculture. My climate change research and youth activist project began in 2023 with a focus on meat consumption and engaged theory in the context of Japan. I argue that the question of the ‘animal’ is central to achieving sustainability. Carnivorism here presents an interconnected macro-micro level praxis that pivots around silencing its impact. As one of the wealthiest and most significant participants in globalised imports and world trade – in raw materials, meat and other food stuff – Japan’s biophysical metrics make it a major contributor to climate change. Climate discourses, however, far outstrip climate action, resulting in less attention being paid to the central contradiction of mainstream corporate and political culture that hails increasing GDP and consumer demand while also claiming support for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As climate data focus primarily on effects rather than causes, narratives of inevitability dominate and in Japan little attention is paid to overconsumption as the major driver of climate change. Here the environmental problems of animal agriculture are framed as issues to be resolved by improved technology, avoiding critique of corporate and government drives that simultaneous increase meat production and consumption for capital growth.

This project investigates the sustainability contradictions of the growth paradigm that go largely unquestioned as particular discursive and embodied social practices normalise everyday consumption. Based on reviews of political discourses, policies, climate data, and fieldwork with youth groups in Tokyo and Okinawa, and ethnographic interviews with around 50 Japanese and 40 international youth interlocutors, as well as short surveys conducted after public lectures, this talk shows ‘carnivorism’ to be a multifaceted macro-micro level praxis underpinned by a ubiquitous ‘common sense’ of silencing the interdependent issues of global injustice, climate breakdown and the almost exclusive relations of exploitation involved in industrialised meat production. This talk explores how as interlocutors un-silence [for themselves and their peers] these strategically hidden consequences and begin to “not eat like everyone else,” they enter embodied social sensibilities of hitherto unquestioned Japanese identity structures that involve facing an embodied social discomfort when causing *meiwaku*, or trouble to others as social taboos surrounding meat are broken. The research illuminates how placing the ‘animal’ at the centre of critical pedagogy gives rise to a new cosmopolitan consciousness with implication for claims to global citizenship and new demands from interlocutors when they ‘awaken’ to how their everyday consumption creates the Capitalocene.



Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen is professor in social anthropology of contemporary Japan in the Department of Humanities and Graduate School of Letters, Soka University in Tokyo. She researches issues related to contemporary Japanese youth, religion, politics, gender, climate change and meat consumption. After completing a PhD in anthropology at SOAS, she published a monography about Kōmeitō and Soka Gakkai Youth (2012), followed by numerous articles on issues on Japanese religion, Japanese security politics, gender, and faith-based responses to Covid-19 with reference to the Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai. Her research since 2023 investigates the paradigm of economic growth and meat consumption, neoliberal personhood and youth climate action in Japan, focusing on sustainability discourses and public consciousness in relation to citizenship. This research includes holding public events, educating for critical consciousness and climate youth activism, using ‘cosmopolitanism’ as method for participatory research designs. <https://researchmap.jp/7000026614?lang=en>

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