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A hug on trash day ハグは資源ゴミの日 Actualising social order through household waste disposal practices

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Brigitte Steger

Thursday
2021-06-24
18:30~20:00
live & online



This lecture takes place at the Campus of the University of Vienna.
For more information and to register for the live event please visit

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



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'We hug on Tuesdays. That's easy to remember as it is recyclables rubbish day.' This is how Mikuri in the popular TV drama 'Nigeru wa haji da ga yaku ni tatsu' ('The Full-time Wife Escapist'; TBS 2016) lays out one of the contractual conditions for her marriage of convenience. In so doing, she inadvertently indicates the extent to which waste disposal and recycling practices structure daily life in Japan.

Following the realisation that Japan needed to increase recycling rates in order to deal with its growing amount of household waste, the 'Containers and Packaging Recycling Law' (*Yōki hōsō risaikuru-hō*) that was implemented in 1997 has reorganised waste disposal and recycling practices. Municipalities are now in charge of collecting and handling waste, and residents follow detailed rules that govern the sorting

and disposal of their household waste.

There are considerable regional differences, but the two basic categories are 'rubbish' (*gomi*), which is mostly incinerated before being taken to landfill, and 'resources' (*shigen*), which are collected for recycling.

In this presentation Steger analyses notions of cleanliness and the categorisation of household waste and examines how individuals, households and neighbourhoods deal with their rubbish. Steger argues that cleanliness and litter-free streets are not simply a cultural characteristic of Japanese society but the result of everyday practices of waste sorting and disposal that actualise the social order. The presentation is based on the preliminary findings of her ongoing research project 'Rubbish! Disposing waste, negotiating community'.

Brigitte Steger (PhD Vienna) is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Modern Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Downing College. In her research, she has always been intrigued by questions of the cultural and social embeddedness of seemingly natural, bodily matters and daily life. Her main research projects have dealt with notions of sleep, time and cleanliness, which have also guided her investigation of life in tsunami evacuation shelters in Yamada town, Iwate prefecture.

Steger is the chair of the Japanese Gender Research Group at Cambridge, which recently published *Beyond Kawaii: Studying Japanese Femininities at Cambridge* (Lit 2020), and is also Secretary General of JAWS, the Japan Anthropology Workshop. She is a Co-Investigator at the Cambridge Circular Plastics Centre (CirPlas) and leads a project on 'Cleanliness, convenience and good citizenship: Plastic and waste in everyday life'. Her project team has launched the publication of the special collection titled 'The bag and beyond: Social science and the social life of plastic' in *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* (2021). Steger has recently published an article on the ethnologist Oka Masao, the founder in 1938 of the Institut für Japankunde at the University of Vienna, and is currently working on a book-length manuscript on sleep habits during the Heian period.



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