



The Japanese-Polish Symposium Minorities, Othering, and the State: Comparative Perspectives from Europe and Asia

Organized by: the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka & Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology, Faculty of Anthropology and Cultural Studies, and Center for Migration Studies)

ABSTRACTS & PROGRAMME

6-7 March 2026
Adam Mickiewicz University
Collegium Historicum, Uniwersytetu Poznańskiego 7, Poznań, r. 1.63

Jacek Splisgart
(University of Gdańsk)

**Relationships between majority and minority identities.
The formation of identity among the inhabitants of Japan, on the example of Japanese and ethnic Koreans.**

The issue of Japanese identity is complex. On the one hand, the myth of a homogeneous Japanese origin and culture is promoted. On the other hand, as social and cultural sciences develop, awareness of the country's ethnocultural diversity grows. Japanese people face the challenge of overcoming ethnic stereotypes and defining the cultural competence of people living in Japan. Nowadays, there is a growing debate about cultural diversity in Japan. The discourse includes considerations about groups inhabiting the northern and southern parts of the country, as well as ethnic minorities who arrived in Japan at various times. My presentation will focus on the analysis of the issue of building Japanese identity. I will examine concepts related to Japanese ethnicity and the underlying beliefs of the country's inhabitants. I will focus on the concepts of belonging to the Japanese nation and multiculturalism, examined in historical and contemporary contexts. In my presentation, I will analyze the formation of identity among the Japanese majority and minority groups, using the example of ethnic Koreans (*zainichi*).

Mark Winchester
(National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)

**Naming, Self-Naming, and the Political Potentiality of the Non-Actualized
— An Ainu Case of Ethnicity at the Limits of Reification**

This paper explores the politics of naming and self-naming through the case of the Ainu poet and thinker Sasaki Masao (1943-), asking whether the political might be located at the limits of ethnic reification. It lingers on the moment in which apparently objective anthropological definitions become something else: a call that demands self-confirmation. What happens when one answers that call, yet refuses to remain within its predicates? Sasaki's formulation of "the I that should have had to begin from a state without predicates" gestures toward an unresolved potential that neither assimilates nor reifies.

Placing this intervention alongside the influential Japanese anthropological theory of Uchibori Motomitsu, who treated ethnicity as a mediating social category generated by naming and stabilized in relation to state power, brings a tension into view. While such a model unsettles essentialism, it nonetheless tends toward the stabilization of ethnicity as an analytical object.

Turning to contemporary Ainu policy, I suggest the shift to multicultural "symbiosis" has rearranged such reification, generating new forms of subordination. In this situation too, might the political emerge not simply in the assertion of identity, but in sustaining a non-actualized potential within and against the classificatory apparatus itself?

Mariusz Filip
(Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology,
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan)

What the state can create, it can also destroy. The case of Slovincians

The presentation focuses on the Slovincians, a disputed minority of Slavic origin, discovered in the mid-19th century and related to the Kashubians, both living on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. I will argue that the identity of the Slovincians has never been recognized on its own terms; from the very beginning, they have been subordinate to the interests of one nation-state or another, which acted through researchers, the clergy, or the administration. Demonstrating the differences and shifts in how the group has been classified theoretically is important, but my main goal is to expose the practical effects of these classifications: from constructing Slovincians to their unmaking.

Mizuho Matsuo
(National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)

Minorities and the State: Genealogy, Racial Classification, and the Making of the Burghers of Sri Lanka

This paper examines the historical formation of the Burghers of Sri Lanka as an officially recognized ethnic minority, situating their emergence within the *longue durée* of colonial governance and postcolonial state formation. It argues that genealogical practices—far from being merely familial records—functioned as technologies through which the state and minority elites co-produced and naturalized ethnic identity.

The Burghers originated in successive Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial regimes through unions between European men and local women. While racial mixture was pervasive across the Indian Ocean world, colonial authorities regarded it with ambivalence, oscillating between incorporation and exclusion. In British Ceylon, the 1830 “Ottley Test” formalized a patrilineal definition of Burgher identity, distinguishing legitimate European descent from other mixed populations. Census classifications further institutionalized this boundary, even as the categories “Burgher” and “Eurasian” remained fluid and overlapping. Thus, minority status was not simply inherited; it was administratively produced.

The establishment of the Dutch Burgher Union (DBU) in 1908 marked a critical moment in minority self-definition. By requiring proof of unbroken patrilineal descent from employees of the Dutch East India Company, the DBU elevated genealogy into an instrument of political representation and boundary-making. These curated genealogies often erased unions with local or Eurasian women, thereby asserting “Europeanness” and distinguishing Dutch Burghers from other mixed communities. Through such practices, ethnicity was purified, codified, and aligned with claims to representation in the colonial Legislative Council.

After independence in 1948, and especially following the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, genealogies acquired new significance. As English-speaking minorities lost privileged access to state institutions, many Burghers emigrated to Australia. Genealogical certificates issued by the DBU functioned as quasi-official documents attesting to European descent under Australia’s White Australia Policy. In this postcolonial context, minority identity—once consolidated within colonial administration—became a resource for negotiating mobility beyond the nation-state.

By tracing how colonial and postcolonial regimes shaped, and were shaped by, genealogical knowledge, this paper demonstrates that minority identity is neither primordial nor purely cultural. Rather, it emerges at the intersection of state classification, elite self-fashioning, and everyday practices of remembering and forgetting. The case of the Burghers reveals how the state’s management of race and descent continues to structure the possibilities of belonging in colonial and post-colonial society.

Zbigniew Szmyt

(Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology,
Adam Mickiewicz University)

Decolonial Ideology and Anti-War Activism among Indigenous Peoples of Siberia in Exile

This presentation examines the emergence of decolonial ideology and anti-war activism among Indigenous peoples of Siberia living in exile following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on ethnographic research among Indigenous activists and migrants from regions such as Buryatia, Sakha, and Tuva, this study explores how experiences of forced migration, political repression, and militarization intersect with long-standing histories of internal colonialism within the Russian state.

The analysis focuses on how decolonial frameworks are mobilized to reinterpret both the war against Ukraine and indigenous subjugation within Russia as part of a shared imperial project. In exile, Indigenous activists articulate alternative political imaginaries that link anti-war resistance with demands for self-determination, cultural survival, and epistemic sovereignty. These discourses circulate through transnational activist networks, digital platforms, and diasporic institutions, reshaping indigenous political subjectivities beyond the territorial confines of the Russian Federation.

The presentation argues that exile functions not only as a condition of displacement but also as a productive space for political reassembly and mobilization, enabling new forms of Indigenous political agency and transnational solidarity.

Michał P. Garapich
(London Metropolitan University)

White, hardworking and violent. Redefining boundaries through deathscapes among Polish far-right groups in the United Kingdom

Following 1989 – due to economic transformation and mass unemployment - around 3 million Polish nationals emigrated to Western Europe; and since 2004, 1 million to the United Kingdom forming diverse communities across the entire country. Among these immigrants, the last decade has seen a formation of numerous far-right organisations, sometimes aligning with British far-right politics, sometimes more connected to the Polish political landscape. The common denominator of these is the articulation of racist, nativist, civilisationist and anti-immigrant political ideas. But how can one be an anti-immigrant migrant? How nationalism – understood as naturalisation and biologisation of connection to physical land – is reproduced outside national boundaries, and how activists reconcile the contradiction of being against immigration while being migrants? A traditional way in scholarship is to frame this as a form of ‘long- distance nationalism’, a term coined by Benedict Anderson, which points to the role of diasporas in home politics. Based on long term ethnographic study of Polish far-right activists in the UK, however, I propose that a more convincing approach is to understand this position as ‘short distance racism’, where it isn’t home nationalist politics that dominate, but rather local hierarchies of racialisation, and how migrants find themselves on complex hierarchies of belonging in the country of settlement. Faced with a distinct British understanding of European whiteness hierarchy which puts Eastern Europeans at a disadvantage, and a group – to use Ivan Kelmar’s term – “white but not quite”, Poles mobilise resources of more symbolic nature, reinforced through rituals around specifically Polish deathscapes: monuments, cemeteries, memorial spaces associated with Polish WW2 veterans, refugees that settled in Britain after 1945. In that strategy, Polish migrants transform their socio-economic position in the UK from profit-driven migrant workers to a moral one, as a new incarnation of military force mobilized to defend Britain. This tactic positions Poles in white supremacist proximity to the English, but also delineates new enemies, and new Others – non-Europeans, Muslims, refugees. Deathscapes whose meanings are recreated through rituals, act therefore as sacred spaces where Polish migrants perform all elements crucial in reinforcing both their belonging and worth among the British (white) majority – hard work, masculinity, violence, whiteness, nostalgia for imperial supremacy, and their transnationally constructed connections with the soil where the dead lie. The contradiction of nationalists abroad is thus overcome through not just an imagined link performed in political action, but through a bodily and intimate experience of connecting with the dead on a physical level during specific rituals around deathscapes.

Chen, Tien Shi

(Waseda University)

Where do I belong? : Roots and Identities of Stateless People in Asia

This presentation will explore roots and identities through the lens of stateless people. Ethnicity, nationality, and family have all historically distinguished between “us” and “others” based on legal systems and bloodlines. Through these distinctions, people form their legal status, sense of belonging, and identity, establishing their belonging and role within society and their relationships with others.

What about stateless people? In modern societies founded upon the nation-state, stateless people are perpetually regarded as outsiders. To clarify their fundamental question of “Where do I belong?” “Who am I?” stateless people trace their family roots. Through this search for roots, they seek to ascertain where they were born and raised, into what family they were born, what ethnicity they belong to, why they became stateless, and even what nationality they ought to be granted. In doing so, they strive to solidify their own foundation.

This presentation will focus on stateless people in Asia. The presenter was born and raised in Japan to Chinese parents and lived as a stateless person for over 30 years. Presenter will discuss why their families became stateless, questioning “Where is my home country” “What is nationality” and “Where do I belong?” which leads her the process of exploring and making these subjects of research.

The presentation will also touch on the case of Japanese descendants left behind in the Philippines among stateless people. Last year marked the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. There are Japanese descendants who were separated from their parents during the war, born and raised stateless in the Philippines. What meaning do their roots hold for them? How do family ties, ethnic background, and nationality affect them? How have the changing times affected them, depending on whether their roots are “clear (certain)” or, conversely, “unclear (uncertain)?” Conversely, how do nation-states, ethnic groups, and families perceive these stateless people? While unraveling these questions, I aim to examine, from multiple angles, the conflicts surrounding the roots of stateless people involving family, ethnicity, and the state.

Natalia Bloch

(Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology,
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan)

Deservingness, Emotional Labour, and Reciprocity. Private Hosting of Ukrainian War Refugees in Poland

In the wake of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Poland received the greatest number of refugees. While many found shelter in the collective accommodation centres, at least half a million people were spontaneously hosted in private homes. This is an unprecedented phenomenon, given the rather unwelcoming attitude of the Polish society towards refugees, which was the result of anti-refugee discourse developed by right-wing politicians since 2015. Such a hosting, which often lasted for months, included not only providing refugees with shelter and food, but also extensive instrumental and emotional support. It can thus be interpreted as a bottom-up, improvised form of refugee sponsorship, a model developed in the late 1970s in Canada as an alternative to collective housing, which has long been criticised for isolating refugees from the host society and leading to counter-integration. In the paper, I scrutinise the dynamics of the private hosting of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland through the categories of deservingness, emotional labour, and reciprocity involved in the roles of hosts and guests. At the end, I pose the question about the potential of this form of refugee reception to forge solidarities against mobility regimes. The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Western Poland among the hosts and hosted refugees. The research was funded by the Polish National Science Centre (grant no. UMO-2023/49/B/HS3/02706).

Izabella Main

(Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology,
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan)

Othering and Racialization in Polish Schools

Schools play a significant role in children's socialization and influence their sense of belonging. This is especially true in the case of migrant, inter-ethnic, non-Caucasian children. Even though the category of race has been debated and criticized (Stockle 1995), young people and their parents in my study have given me instances when they felt not seen as Polish or "our" children in schools. The analyzed group includes children born abroad who migrated with their parents to Poland, as well as children born in Poland to foreign parents or a parent. Even if some had Polish citizenship, they were still seen as different because of their appearance and name. This visibility in a predominantly white society, as well as a diverse identity, had an impact on their and their parents' choices of schools. In large cities in Poland, there is a selection of public and private schools, sometimes with a special focus on music, foreign languages, international or innovative programs. Some parents and students of migrant children made a special effort when selecting schools to improve the chances of "fitting in" and a more tolerant welcome.

The questions addressed in my presentation, therefore, are: How do children experience their exclusion? Who and how determines the boundaries of belonging? What strategies do parents and children apply to address exclusions and foster belonging?

The presentation is based on ethnographic material collected within the project "Good Beginnings, Promising Futures. Children with Migration Backgrounds in Polish Schools".

Masashi Nara

(National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)

Sinicization of Ethnicity: Discourses on Hui Roots and Transformations in Ethno-Religiosity

This paper examines debates over the origins of the Hui as a case study to explore how, in light of the Hui's history and the changing religious and social contexts surrounding them, such discussions may open up possibilities for coexistence between the Hui and other ethnic groups. The Hui are generally understood as an "ethnic group" formed through intermarriage between foreign Muslims who arrived in China from the mid-seventh century onward and local populations who later converted to Islam.

Owing to their historical circumstances, the Hui are widely dispersed across China and have long lived in close proximity to Han communities. Consequently, apart from their adherence to Islam, there are no clear markers that distinguish the Hui from the Han. As a result, debates emerged within the Hui community during the Republican era over whether the Hui could in fact be regarded as a distinct ethnic group. Nevertheless, under the Chinese Communist Party's ethnic classification system, the Muslims now referred to as "Hui" came to be officially recognized as one of China's minority nationalities. The definition of the Hui as an ethnic group of foreign Muslim origin that historically took shape through intermarriage with the Han has since become widely accepted in the humanities and social sciences.

In recent years, however, debates over the origins of the Hui based on DNA analysis have intensified. These studies emphasize the genetic homogeneity between the Hui and the Han rather than descent from foreign Muslims. They conclude that the Hui possess

only limited West Eurasian–related ancestry and display a high degree of genetic similarity with East Asian populations. Accordingly, they argue that the Hui were formed not through large-scale population movements but through processes of assimilation between foreign Muslims who arrived in China and local Han populations. Although these conclusions do not substantially depart from the established scholarly understanding of the Hui’s origins, such studies have nevertheless fueled online debates about the Hui’s roots, often portraying them as genetically indistinguishable from the Han.

In this paper, I first examine how DNA-based research on the origins of the Hui—and the online discourses that build upon it—fit within a broader political and social context that places renewed emphasis on genetic proximity between the Hui and the Han. I then consider how these developments may paradoxically shape possibilities for coexistence between the Hui and other ethnic groups, focusing in particular on transformations in Hui ethno-religiosity.

Konrad Pędziwiatr

Caracow University of Economics

Banalized Polish Islamophobia and Muslim Minority Reactions to It

Although a relatively small Muslim minority has been living in Poland for over six centuries and is part and parcel of Polish society, fear of Islam and Muslims in the country appears more widespread than in other parts of Europe that have a much shorter history of encounters with Muslims (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017; Pędziwiatr 2019). The Muslim “Other” has been skilfully politicized, first by more radical groups and later by mainstream political actors, leading to a shift from nationalism to “civilizationism” (Brubaker 2017), in which Muslims and Islam are framed as major cultural threats. Various Muslim groups have reacted differently to banalized forms of Polish Islamophobia (Pędziwiatr 2016), thereby taking an active part in the national production and reproduction of boundaries between self and others.

The paper explores the complex evolution of anti-Muslim prejudices, their normalization -mainstreamization, and Muslim identity politics in Poland from the early 2000s onward. It examines how two major Muslim organizations—the Muslim Religious Union (MZR), led by the Tatars, and the Muslim League (LM), led by Polish citizens of Arab descent—respond differently to Islamophobic narratives and acts. While the MZR strongly emphasizes Polishness, European identity, and cultural assimilation, frequently downplaying the existence or seriousness of Islamophobia, the LM adopts a more confrontational strategy through activism, public advocacy, and media engagement. Internal divisions within both communities (e.g., conflicts within the MZR) have further weakened collective responses to the phenomenon. Overall, the text highlights how external political dynamics, internal organizational conflicts, and growing societal hostility shape the lived experiences of Muslims in Poland, influencing their strategies of adaptation, concealment, and resistance in an increasingly polarized social environment.

Michał Buchowski

(Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology,
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan)

Aliens – Familiar and Ultimate: Orientalism, Gypsyism, and the Racialization of Roma and Muslims in Poland

This article examines the relationship between Orientalism and Gypsyism – two forms of exoticizing and racializing of the Muslim and Roma minorities in Poland. It focuses on how these constructs relate to the image of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state, in which ‘Others’ are perceived as a threat to the nation’s body and its sociocultural coherence. While Muslims and Roma are viewed differently, both are exoticized and racialized, seen as embodying negative traits considered incompatible with the ‘We’ of the national community. By juxtaposing Gypsyism and Orientalism, the collective imaginaries through which these groups are constructed as racialized Others are explored.

PROGRAMME

Friday, 6 March 2026

9:45–10:00 – Opening

10:00–10:15 – *Introduction: On minorities, Othering and the State in Comparative Perspective*
(Michał Buchowski and Mizuho Matsuo)

Part I – State, Minorities and Identities

10:15–10:50 – Jacek **Splisgart** (Gdańsk University)

Relationships between Majority and Minority Identities: The Formation of Identity among the Inhabitants of Japan, on the Example of Japanese and Ethnic Koreans

10:50–11:25 – Mark **Winschester** (National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)

An Ainu Case of Indigenous Ethnicity at the Limits of Reification

11:25–12:00 – Mariusz **Filip** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

What the state can create, it can also destroy. The case of Slovincians

12:00–13:15 – *Lunch break*

Part II: Post-Colonial and Neo-Imperial and Identities

13:15–13:50 – Mizuho **Matsuo** (National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)

Colonial Roots and Forgotten Lineages: Dutch Burghers as an Ethnic Minority in Sri Lanka

13:50–14:25 – Zbigniew **Szmyt** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan)

Decolonial Ideology and Anti-War Activism among Indigenous Peoples of Siberia in Exile

14:25–14:45 – Michał **Garapich** (London Metropolitan University)

White, hardworking and violent. Redefining boundaries through deathscapes among Polish far-right activists in the United Kingdom.

14:45– 15:00 – *Coffee break*

15:00–16:00 – Discussion

18:30 – Dinner for participants

PROGRAMME

Saturday, 7 March 2026

Part IV: Othering and Racializing of Migrants

- 10:00–10:35 – Tien Shi **Chen** (Waseda University, Tokyo)
Where I belong?: Roots and Identities of Stateless People
- 10:35–11:10 – Natalia **Bloch** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan)
Deservingness, Emotional Labour, and Reciprocity. Private Hosting of Ukrainian War Refugees in Poland
- 11:10–11:45 – Izabella **Main** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)
Othering and Racialization in Polish Schools
- 11:45–13:00 – *Lunch*

Part III: Ethno-Religious Phobias

- 13:00–13:35 – Masashi **Nara** (National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka)
Sinicization of Ethnicity: Discourses on Hui Roots and Transformations in Ethno-Religiosity
- 13:35–14:10 – Konrad **Pędziwiatr** (Economic Univeristy in Cracow)
Banalized Polish Islamophobia and Muslim Minority Reactions to It
- 14:10–14:45 – Michal **Buchowski** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)
Two Modes of Exoticization of Muslims and Roma in Poland: Orientalism and Gypsylorism
- 14:45–15:00 – *Coffee break*

15:00–16:00 – Closing Discussion