



Lecture

# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF JAPAN'S SUPER-AGED SOCIETY

**Dr. Jason Danely**

Oxford Brookes University, UK

**16 October 2024**

**13:30–15:00**

**HS 01.15**

(Main building,  
Universitätsplatz 3, 1<sup>st</sup> floor)



The lecture is a cooperation between the Department of Religious Studies and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Aging and Care (CIRAC).

## The Spiritual Life of Japan's Super-Aged Society

### Abstract

Japan is the oldest country in the world (almost 30% of the population is over 65, compared to a mere 19% in Austria), and for decades, public concerns about the social, economic, and cultural consequences of this historically unprecedented population ageing has shaped both Japanese art and politics. I argue that demographic change is also reshaping Japanese religious sensibilities. Spiritual matters, from pilgrimage to mortuary rituals, take on new significance as they are used to reflect on processes of ageing, caring, and dying. Correspondingly, the un-ritualised end of life has become a haunting image of the grief accompanying social change. This talk will draw on examples from my fieldwork with older Japanese adults and family members caring for them in Kyoto, Japan, as well as recent portrayals of old age film. I will use these examples to reflect on the ways rituals provide meaningful narratives to understand and shape what it means to live well in an ageing society.



**Jason Danely** is Reader in Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University. He has conducted research on various topics related to Japan's ageing society, including the role of mortuary rituals, the experiences of unpaid carers of older family members, and most recently, the obstacles to resettlement of formerly incarcerated older adults. His books include *Aging and Loss: Mourning and Maturity in Contemporary Japan* (2014), *Fragile Resonance: Caring for Older Family Members in Japan and England* (2022), and *Unsettled Futures: Carceral Circuits and Old Age in Japan* (2024).