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## Kinship, Citizenship, and the Problems of International Custody

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### **Abstract**

While American popular attention has been focused on Toyota's inefficient recalls, another issue has become increasingly important in Japan's global geopolitical relationships. Because Japan has not signed the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the Japanese government does not prosecute or extradite citizens who disregard some legal rulings in other countries. Though the Hague Convention was originally intended to reduce human trafficking or child soldiers, in the Japanese context it pertains most to international child custody cases between divorced parents of different nationalities. In almost 200 cases since 1980, Japanese ex-spouses with joint or no custody of their children as granted in American courts, have brought children to Japan. In 2009, political and popular attention crystallized around the case of Christopher Savoie, an American ex-husband who had been granted joint custody of his two children in American courts. When his ex-wife, Noriko Savoie, brought the children to Japan and refused to leave, Christopher was arrested on kidnapping charges after he tried to grab the children on their way to school.

Because the Japanese nation-state has been organized through family idioms, and citizenship is legally tied to family membership, the Hague convention can be seen to challenge fundamental elements of the nation-state. This presentation examines the intersection of kinship, citizenship, and international norms in these international child custody cases. Based on ethnographic research conducted with politicians, consultants, and families, the presentation situates Japanese reactions to international demands for revised family laws.

### **Short biography**

Allison Alexy is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Lafayette College. Her research considers romance, intimacy, and family lives in contemporary Japan. With Richard Ronald, she is co-editor of a forthcoming volume entitled, "Home and Family in Contemporary Japan: Continuity and Transformation."