



Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien
German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
ドイツ日本研究所



Imagined Futures in Japan and Beyond

A workshop at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo

<https://dij.tokyo/futures>

Organizer: Nicole M. Mueller, Senior Research Fellow

Date: October 09-11, 2024

CALL FOR PAPERS

The DIJ, in collaboration with the German Centre for Research and Innovation (DWIH) Tokyo, is organizing an interdisciplinary workshop delving into both fictional and nonfictional portrayals of Japan's technological future. We will juxtapose these visions with those from other cultures and analyze them through the lens of "narrative" and "sociotechnical imaginary" theoretical frameworks.

The future begins with imagination. Consider Mark Zuckerberg's 'Metaverse', inspired by Neal Stephenson's 1992 novel *Snow Crash*, or Japan's 'Society 5.0' campaign, envisioning a digitally transformed "Super Smart Society". Japanese tech giants like Sony and NTT also recognize storytelling's role in fostering innovation and societal acceptance of emerging technologies, particularly in Sci-Fi collaborations. These narrative visions of Japan's tech-driven future make some predictions about the future, but most importantly, they channel emotional attitudes, such as hope and fear.

This situates them within the realm of "narratives" and "sociotechnical imaginaries". Like "discourse", narratives thoroughly pervade scholarly and everyday discussions. Peter Brooks (2022) illustrates this by noting how even mundane purchases, like buying cookies, involve encountering brand narratives proudly displayed on the packaging. Similarly, the theoretical concept of narrative spans a wide range of academic disciplines: "life narratives" are gathered through qualitative interviews in sociology and psychology, purposefully crafted narratives are a research subject of political science (election campaigns), legal studies (legal argumentation and statements) and economics (marketing), while cultural (meta-)narratives are addressed by cultural studies and history. One reason for this omnipresence of narrative might be their persuasive and even therapeutic power, which, as Fritz Breithaupt (2022/2024) suggests, rests in their ability to promise rewarding emotions.

Building from this, "sociotechnical imaginaries" can be defined as a more normative subtype of narrative instrumentalized in political and economic contexts. Introduced in Jasanoff and Kim's 2009 study on the differing attitudes towards nuclear energy in South Korea and the US, sociotechnical imaginaries have been almost exclusively studied within Science and Technology Studies.

The aim of our workshop is to bring together scholars whose work engages with narratives and/or imaginaries of the future, especially but not exclusively in relation to Japan. Presentations may address the content of said narratives and imaginaries, their influences on the academic and non-academic discourses, or different methodological approaches (including those from Digital Humanities). In addition to the workshop presentations, we will invite practitioners from Japan's tech industry for practical insights into the creation and circulation of future-related imaginaries. An excursion to sites in Tokyo where Japanese conceptions of the future become tangible is also planned.

The workshop is organized by Nicole M. Mueller (DIJ Tokyo) in cooperation with Christian Oberländer and Uwe Wolfradt (MLU Halle-Wittenberg). The Keynote Speaker is Fritz Breithaupt (Experimental Humanities Lab, Indiana University Bloomington), author of *The Dark Sides of Empathy* (2019, Cornell University Press), and *The Narrative Brain* (in press, Yale University Press).

Travel (national and international) and accommodation in Tokyo can be provided for a total of around 10 participants. We plan to do partially hybrid panel sessions via zoom, but for presenters, attendance in person is preferable.

Scholars whose research aligns with the thematic scope of our workshop are invited to send their abstracts (500 words maximum) for their planned presentations (in English) via E-Mail to mueller@dijtokyo.org by **June 15, 2024**. We plan to publish the presented papers and our discussion results as an edited volume.

We welcome paper proposals by scholars from different career stages (including PhD students) and from a variety of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. Participants who are accepted for the workshop will be notified by July 5, 2024.