



EA F 未来

Research Training Group (GRK 2833)

East Asian Futures

Visions and Realizations on National, Transregional and Global Scales

Activity Report

2026

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Research Training Group (GRK 2833) East Asian Futures

Activity Report, 2026

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Preface

It has barely been a year since the last major event of the Research Training Group GRK 2833 “East Asian Futures”, the Fieldwork Results Workshop of Cohort 1 and the Inauguration of Cohort 2 in Herne in October 2025. That event brought together both cohorts of our group, as well as the new Qualifying Fellows, for the first time. With 14 doctoral researchers, five affiliated doctoral researchers, one postdoc and three affiliated postdocs, as well as 12 Qualifying Fellows, a total of 35 young scholars are and have been participating in the programme.

Even though only nine months have passed, we can report on several new important events and activities that have taken place since then. Networking and cooperation workshops were organised in November 2025 at our partner universities and institutes in East Asia: Nankai University in Tianjin, East China Normal University in Shanghai, National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei, and the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo. These events helped deepen our relationships and cooperative profiles. We gained insight into our partners’ research productivity and enjoyed learning about new research topics, including, for example, Switzerland’s foreign aid assistance, state governance of telecommunications networks in Republican China, Eastern European influences on porcelain production in Jingdezhen during the early PRC era, and the broader subject of technology, globalisation, and societal challenges in Japan and Asia.

Another notable, interactive event the RTG conducted was the Public Outreach Event in March 2026, entitled “Visions of the Future in East Asian Cinema”. Doctoral researchers and Qualifying Fellows, organised in four groups, selected one film each from China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. They investigated plots and backgrounds of the films, which they then presented alongside screenings at two locations in Bochum. Discussions with the audience followed each screening. Afterwards, the groups wrote blog posts on the films reflecting on the relationship between their own everyday text-based research and cinematic representation of future themes.

A particular highlight was the first graduation within our RTG. On April 30, 2026, affiliated doctoral researcher Youlim KIM successfully defended her thesis, “Transformation and Construction of Social Discourse on Unmarried Mothers in South Korea”, supervised by Marion EGGERT and Karen SHIRE. Her research analysed the societal role and status of unmarried mothers from the 1960s to the 2010s. In terms of the RTG, Ms. KIM’s work falls under the research field of “Self and Society”. In a chapter dedicated specifically to the future prospects of these formerly marginalised and stigmatised women, she demonstrates how societal values have gradually changed since the 2000s, taking into account demographic issues and state policies. With the lifting of the emphasis on paternal household registration and the greater opportunities for women to participate in the workforce, earning a living for themselves and their children, the future seems to offer more scope for alternative family and childcare models. The research was based on literature and journalism, reflecting on the differences and tensions between the two, and used state-of-the-art digital text analysis tools. In view of Youlim KIM’s encouraging, pioneering example, the RTG looks with great expectation to the writing-up phase of Cohort 1 and wishes all its members the very best for the finalisation of their doctoral theses.

While this preface started with an overview of the young researchers involved, there is further good news from the group of senior researchers. Sören URBANSKY, Professor of Eastern European History at Ruhr University Bochum, joined the group as a participating researcher in March 2026. With his expertise on Russia as a major power, and on individual, often transnational, spheres of action — a topic of utmost importance to all East Asian nations — URBANSKY brings a valuable fresh perspective to the issues addressed by the GRK.

Bochum and Duisburg in May 2026

The RTG Speaker and Co-Speaker

Christine MOLL-MURATA and Markus TAUBE

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Project outline

Short synopses in English, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese may be found below.

Introduction

The Research Training Group GRK 2833 “East Asian Futures: Visions and Realizations on National, Transregional and Global Scales” (EAF), directed by Prof. Dr. Christine MOLL-MURATA and Prof. Dr. Markus TAUBE, aims to train doctoral researchers about conceptions relating to the future in East Asia. It is based at the **Faculty of East Asian Studies** of Ruhr University Bochum and at the **Institute of East Asian Studies** of the University of Duisburg-Essen, at the two big research centres for East Asian Studies in North-Rhine Westphalia in Germany, joined together in the research initiative **Alliance for Research on East Asia (AREA) Ruhr**.

The programme develops and applies an analytical model of conceptions of the future, complementing research in the humanities (history, linguistics, philology, religious studies) with research in the social sciences (economics, political science, sociology).

Doctoral dissertations in this Research Training Group study and explain how projections and conceptions of the future have emerged, on what premises they are based, and how they have been and continue to be applied to the paradigmatic fields of (1) language, religion, and ideology, (2) self and society, (3) resources and technology, and (4) sovereignty and governance.

Research focuses on the period between 1850 and the present, with recourse to earlier intellectual heritage where necessary. The analyses include projections of the future by East Asian states and polities (China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) in relation to each other, to Europe, and the world.

The programme opens up a new field of research in East Asian area studies, combining a macro-regional perspective with a focus on the modern and contemporary periods.

The support of the German Research Foundation DFG is gratefully acknowledged.

Research

Core Research Idea and Main Topic

The Research Training Group GRK 2833 "East Asian Futures" proposes the study, analysis, and explanation of the **conceptions of future in East Asia**.

Taking a **chronological view**, East Asia has experienced epistemological change through confrontation with Western ideas and political, economic, and military dominance of the West since the mid-nineteenth century. The period before these interactions can be designated as **tradition**, or heritage.

The period between 1850 and 1950 constitutes an era of **transformation**, during which the ideational, political, and economic foundations for global interconnections evolved.

After 1950, new regimes, political systems and ideologies used projections of the future in ways previously unheard of. This tendency of **realization** made the People's Republic of China, Japan, North and South Korea, and Taiwan coalesce with and compete against each other due to ideological opposition during the Cold War and also against the backdrop of global threats.

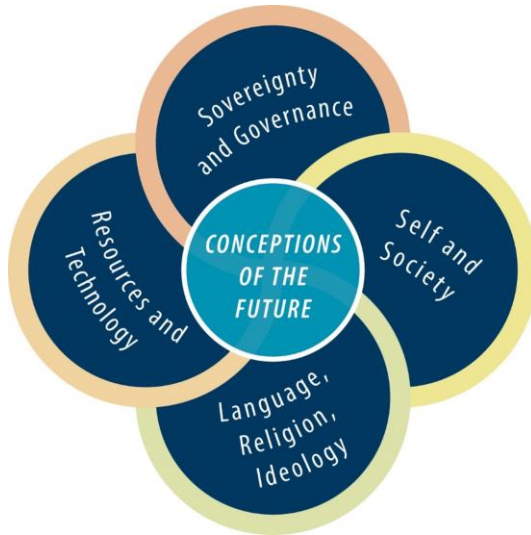
Yet with intensifying **globalization** and the rise of the East Asian economies, a new phase began in the 1980s. This period has lasted until today, even if in view of the recent crises some voices predict the end of this macro-trend.

Geographically, the East Asian perspective taken by our group includes the two large polities China and Japan, with Korea and Taiwan constituting smaller entities with colonial pasts. We will reflect on the projections of the future within East Asian states and polities, and in relation to each other, Europe, and the world.

The innovative potential of the programme lies in the application of an analytical model of approaches to the conceptions of future as a tool that connects the group across the humanities and the social sciences. In all these fields conceptualizations of the future lie at the core of legitimation and self-assertion, from the level of the individual to supra-state entities.

Thematic Areas and Typology of Approaches to the Future

The project covers **four thematic areas**. Starting out from the perspective of the future as a term and notion, our group identified **Language, Religion, and Ideology**, **Self and Society**, **Resources and Technology** and **Sovereignty and Governance** as the fields most relevant for future themes.



Thematic areas of the project

The project applies a typology that was inspired by a model for conceptualizations of the future developed by the contemporary historians GRAF and HERZOG (2016) which we adapted to fit the East Asian context. Graf and Herzog's categories of analysis include the following modes:

The "anticipation of the inevitable" or **future of expectation** appears in the form of religious, philosophical, and ideological outlines, prognoses, and instructions. In pre-twentieth century East Asia, this pertains especially to Confucian and Buddhist thought. The expectation of modernisation according to the Euro-American model emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, socialist concepts based on the premise of an inexorable course of history also belong in this category,

as do responses to globalization that emphasize continuities in East Asian divergences from (neo-)liberal market transformations.

The mode **future of planning** refers to an active attitude towards future concerns, realized or to be realized in politics, economics, science, and technology. In East Asia, the fields in which conceptions of the future of this type occur are phases of socialist planned economies, but also Japan's colonial policies between 1895 and 1945, and thereafter, the 'developmental state' involvement in industrial policy. It also relates to modern state-business connections that combine top-down planning with bottom-up market structures. An example of this mode of planning is to be found in urbanism, where urban planning is often based on utopian concepts of society and technology.

The dystopian **future of risk** relates to the experience of cataclysms, especially of technological warfare. This type of approach to the future aims to cope with the unexpected and guard against the dangerous and undesired by means of scenarios. During the encroachments on China's sovereignty in the first half of the twentieth century, warfare in WWII and the Korean War, the nuclear threat and system competition in the Cold War, and unresolved issues of unification or independence until now, the awareness of risk and a potentially disastrous future has been and is present.

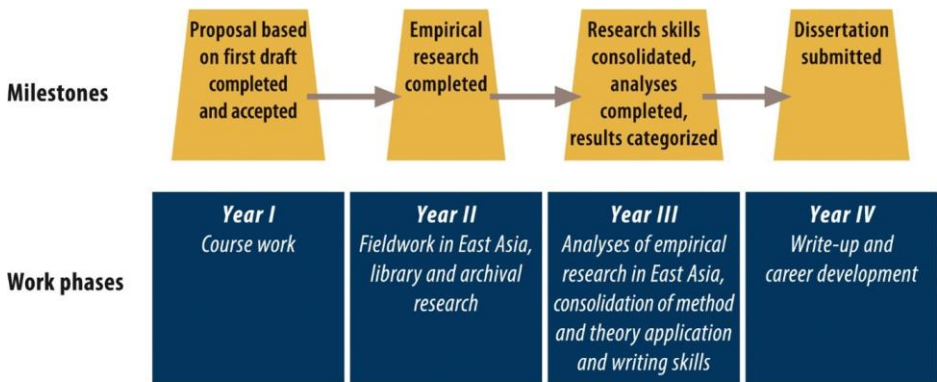
The **future of preservation** represents the notion that natural resources may not be available in unlimited quantities, and that cultural heritage may fall into oblivion. "Future of preservation" reflects the intention to protect the desirable, in the awareness that environmental deterioration might be irreversible, and especially with respect to securing both the ecosphere and cultural heritage in the interest of intergenerational justice. This projection of the future is also relevant for imagining social protection in the face of economic globalization, and for addressing the challenges posed by demographic changes that threaten reproduction in the populations of East Asia.

Didactic Goals

Doctoral researchers will acquire a qualification in East Asian regional studies and in one of the disciplines in the humanities (history, philology, linguistics, religious studies) or the social sciences (sociology, political science, economics) included in the programme, with an emphasis on advanced theories and methodologies.

The central aim of the qualification programme is to develop the specific profile of language- and discipline-based area studies research. This concept is operationalized through the establishment of a specific course programme and methodological training at the RUB, UDE and other institutions in Germany and East Asia. Career development measures complete the programme, to ensure that graduates are well prepared for entering international research careers.

The **curriculum** of the doctoral research programme is designed to run for four years. During their first year, participants will take classes on theories and methods, where they will receive coaching for their specific topics early on. The second year mainly consists of a period of fieldwork (6–12 months) and/or archival/library research. In the third year, the doctoral researchers will analyse and present the first results of their field and archival or library work to a larger academic audience apart from their colleagues and supervisors in the Research Training Group. The final year will focus on the write-up of their dissertations and preparation for career development.



Work phases and milestones of the doctoral research programme

Postdoctoral researchers engage in a similarly structured programme that spans over 5 years and incorporates two short-term fieldwork phases. They also conduct peer teaching of the doctoral researchers, organise joint events with the doctoral researchers, and are offered opportunities to present their research at RUB and UDE events as well as those organised by the Research Training Group itself.

Synopsis in English

Research Training Group (RTG) East Asian Futures: Visions and Realizations on National, Transregional and Global Scales

The RTG "East Asian Futures" provides doctoral researchers with training in concepts about the future in East Asia. It is based at the Faculty of East Asian Studies of the Ruhr University Bochum and at the Institute of East Asian Studies of the University of Duisburg-Essen. These are two big research centres for East Asian Studies in Germany, joined together in the Alliance for Research on East Asia (AREA) Ruhr.

The RTG was launched in October 2023 and to date includes nine doctoral researchers, four postdocs, and four qualifying M.A. students. The programme is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Core research ideas

The programme develops and applies an analytical model of conceptions of the future, complementing research in the humanities with research in the social sciences.

Doctoral dissertations study and explain how projections and conceptions of the future have emerged, on what premises they are based, and how they have been and continue to be applied to four paradigmatic fields.

The time focus is on the period between 1850 and the present, with recourse to earlier intellectual heritage. The analyses include projections of the future by the East Asian states and polities, China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, in relation to each other, to Europe, and the world.

Didactic goals

Doctoral researchers of the RTG "East Asian Futures" will acquire a qualification in East Asian regional studies and in one of the disciplines in the humanities (history, philology, linguistics, religious studies) or the social sciences (sociology, political science, economics) included in the programme, with an emphasis on advanced theories and methodologies.

The central aim of the qualification programme is to develop the specific profile of language- and discipline-based area studies research. This concept is operationalized through the establishment of a specific course programme and methodological training at the RUB, UDE and other institutions in Germany and East Asia. Career development measures complete the programme, to ensure that graduates are well prepared for entering international research careers.

Curriculum

Year 1: classes on theories and methods coach graduate researchers for their specific topics early on

Year 2: fieldwork and/or archival/library research

Year 3: analysis and presentation of the first results of fieldwork and archival/library research to a larger academic audience

Year 4: write-up and preparation for career development

A series of milestones, at which doctoral researchers complete specific steps toward the completion of their dissertation, is set up to ensure timely work procedures.

Synopsis in Chinese

“东亚与未来”课题组（RTG）： 国家、跨地区和全球范围的愿景与实践

“东亚与未来”课题组提供与未来观念相关的专题博士课程。它由波鸿鲁尔大学东亚研究学院和杜伊斯堡-埃森大学东亚研究所联合创办。这两所在德国颇具规模的东亚研究中心组成了鲁尔区东亚研究联盟（AREA Ruhr）。

本课题组于 2023 年 10 月正式启动，迄今已有 9 名博士生、4 名博士后和 4 名硕士生参与其中。项目资金来自于德国研究基金会（DFG）。

核心研究理念

本课题组旨在构建并应用与未来概念相关的分析模型，综合人文和社会科学的研究方法。

选题方面，博士论文应能解释未来观念与预测是如何出现的，它们基于什么样的前提假设，以及它们是如何在四个范式领域中运作的。

研究的时间跨度聚焦 1850 年至今，也回溯更早期的知识脉络。分析对象包括东亚国家和政体（中国、日本、韩国和台湾）的未来观念，这些观念之间的关系，以及它们和欧洲还有世界的关系。

教学目标

“东亚与未来”博士生将在东亚区域研究和人文学科（历史学、语文学、语言学、宗教研究）或社会科学（社会学、政治学、经济学）领域进行学术训练（侧重深化理论和方法论）并获得相关资格认证。

本项目的核心目标是培养以语言和学科为基础的区域研究能力。参与机构包括波鸿大学、杜伊斯堡-埃森大学以及在德国和东亚的其他相关研究所。本项目亦注重博士生的职业生涯发展，以期未来具备立足国际学界的能力。

课程设置

“东亚与未来”课程设立了一系列目标里程碑，循序渐进，确保博士生在既定时间内完成论文。

第 1 年：理论和方法课程，协助硕博研究人员尽早开展专题研究

第 2 年：田野工作和档案/图书馆研究阶段

第 3 年：分析并介绍田野研究和档案/图书馆研究的初步成果，将面对除研究培训小组同事和导师外的更多学界人士

第 4 年：撰写论文并为职业发展做准备

Synopsis in Korean

동아시아 미래 연구(RTG): 국가적, 초국가적, 그리고 글로벌 규모의 비전과 실현

"동아시아 미래 연구"는 박사 과정 연구자들이 동아시아 맥락에서의 미래 개념에 관한 이해를 높일 수 있는 기회를 제공합니다. 본 그룹은 보훔 루르대학교 동아시아학부와 뒤스부르크-에센대학교 동아시아 연구소에 기초하고 있습니다. 해당 기관은 독일 내 동아시아 연구의 중요한 거점으로서, 루르 동아시아 연구 연합 (AREA) 으로 소속되어 있습니다.

RTG 는 2023 년 10 월 출범 이후 현재까지 박사과정 연구원 9 인, 박사 후 연구원 4 인, 석사 과정생 4 인으로 구성되어 있습니다. 해당 프로그램은 독일 연구위원회 (DFG)의 지원을 받습니다.

핵심 연구 주제

"동아시아 미래 연구" 프로그램은 미래 개념에 대한 분석 모델을 개발, 적용하며 인문학과 사회과학적 연구를 진행합니다.

해당 프로그램에서 진행되는 박사 학위 논문은 네 가지 패러다임 차원에서의 미래 개념과 예측의 발전과정 그리고 이를 위한 전제조건에 중점을 둔 연구를 진행합니다.

1850 년부터 현재까지의 지적사료를 바탕으로 진행되는 해당 연구들은 중국, 일본, 한국, 대만 등 동아시아 국가와 정체(政體)의 상호간 혹은 유럽 및 세계와의 관계 속에 진행되는 미래 상을 분석합니다.

교육목표

"동아시아 미래"의 박사과정 연구자는 동아시아 지역 연구와 더불어 인문학 (역사학, 문헌학, 언어학, 종교학) 또는 사회과학 (사회학, 정치학, 경제학) 분야 내에서 이론과 방법론을 배우게 됩니다.

프로그램의 핵심 목표는 연구자로서의 언어 및 학문 기반 지역학 연구를 구체적으로 개발하는 것입니다. 이를 위하여 보훔 루르 대학교와 뒤스부르크-에센, 독일 내 기타 연구기관과 동아시아 기관의 프로그램과 방법론적 훈련이 협력 운영되고 있습니다. 또한 진행되는 커리어 개발 프로그램은 박사과정 학생들이 국제 연구자로 발돋움하는데 기여하게 됩니다.

커리큘럼

1 년차: 이론과 방법 수업, 개별 연구 주제에 대한 초기 코칭

2 년차: 현장 조사 및/또는 아카이브/문헌 조사 기간

3 년차: 필드워크 및 문헌연구의 첫번째 결과물을 지도교수와 동료 박사과정생 외의 더 많은 연구자들에게 발표

4 년차: 논문작성 및 커리어 개발

박사 과정 연구자가 학위 취득을 위해 밟게 되는 각각의 단계를 시기별로 조정하여 일련의 이정표를 제공합니다.

Synopsis in Japanese

リサーチトレーニンググループ「東アジアの未来」 国家、地域、グローバルなビジョンとその実現

リサーチトレーニンググループ（RTG）「東アジアの未来」は、東アジアにおける多種多様な未来に関する概念に焦点を当て、博士課程研究生を育成するものです。本プログラムはルール大学ボーフム東アジア学部（RUB）とデュースブルク・エッセン大学東アジア研究所（UDE）を拠点としています。ともにドイツにおける東アジア研究を牽引する研究機関であり、ルール東アジア研究同盟（AREA）の加盟機関でもあります。

RTG は 2023 年 10 月に発足し、現在 9 名の博士研究生、4 名のポスドク、4 名の修士課程の学生を擁しています。このプログラムはドイツ研究振興協会 (DFG) の助成を受けています。

核となる研究アイデア

本プログラムは、「未来」概念を研究の核にすえ、その分析モデルの構築・適用を通して社会科学研究と人文科学研究を相互補完を目指しています。

博士論文では、未来に関する予測や概念がどのように生み出され、どのような前提に基づいているのか、またそれらが 4 つのパラダイム分野にどのように適用され、現在も適用され続けているのかを研究・分析します。

1850 年から現在までの期間に焦点をあて、知的遺産にも言及しつつ、中国、日本、韓国、台湾という東アジアの国家及び政治実体が相互関係、また欧州・世界との関係においていかなる未来を予測してきたか、予測しているのかを分析します。

教育目標

RTG「東アジアの未来」通して、博士課程研究者は東アジア地域研究に精通するだけでなく、人文科学（歴史学、言語学、宗教学）または社会科学（社会学、政治学、経済学）のいずれかの分野の高度な理論・方法論を取得することができます。

このプログラムの主目的は、研究対象地域の言語と専門分野の枠組み双方を基礎とした地域研究を構築することです。このコンセプトは、RUB、UDE、その他ドイツや東アジアの研究機関におけるプログラムや方法論的トレーニングの確立を通じて実践されています。同時に、本プログラムの卒業生が国際的な研究キャリアを築いていくためのキャリア開発プログラムも用意されています。

カリキュラム

1年次：理論と方法についての授業、早い段階から特定のテーマについて博士研究生の指導開始

2年次：フィールドワークおよび／またはアーカイブ・図書館での調査

3年次：フィールドワークとアーカイブ・図書館での調査結果の分析、プログラム内外において調査分析結果の発表

4年次：論文執筆とキャリア形成

博士号取得までのステップを明確化したマイルストーンは、課程終了・学位取得のために必要な事項を逐次・適時行うことができるよう設定されています。

Project activities



Participants of the Fieldwork Results Workshop, Oct 8, 2025 © RUB, Wiemann

In October 2025, the second cohort of doctoral researchers, with seven fully-funded and two affiliated members, enrolled in the RTG's programme and took up their work at the University of Duisburg-Essen and Ruhr University Bochum. The annual event on October 8–10, titled **"Fieldwork Results Workshop and Inauguration of Cohort II"**, served the dual purpose of introducing the new members and their prospective research to the group, and of showcasing the results of the fieldwork the first cohort and the postdoctoral researchers have been conducting in the project's second year. Taking place at the LWL Archaeological Museum in Herne, Germany, about 60 participants, including faculty members, Mercator Fellows, and guests, engaged in lively discussions on the diverse topics covered by the research group.

A unique opportunity to engage with the RTG's partner institutions and to meet fellow researchers abroad presented itself in the **workshop series in East Asia** conducted by the RTG in November 2025, in which members of the group visited partner institutions

in Tianjin, Shanghai, Taipei, and Tokyo. On November 3, RTG members participated in a joint workshop with the Department of Economics at Nankai University in Tianjin, followed by a visit to the Zhou Enlai School of Government. The second workshop was held at the East China Normal University's Minhang Campus in the outskirts of Shanghai on November 5. The RTG was hosted by Prof. Xiaocai FENG and had the opportunity to both engage with his graduate students and observe his classes. The Taiwan workshop at the History Department of National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei on November 10 was conducted by RTG Mercator Fellow Professor Lin-Chun WU, with her graduate students joining the workshop's audience. Finally, the fourth workshop of the series took place at the Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien (DIJ) in Tokyo on November 13. This event was hosted by Dr. Nicole M. MÜLLER, who facilitated the discussions and brought in perspectives from the institute's ongoing projects, together with her colleagues and guests. Taken together, these workshops revealed how concepts of the future are shaped by specific historical trajectories, cultural contexts, and present-day social and political concerns. They also demonstrated the value of sustained academic exchange.



Workshops at Nankai University (top left), ECNU (top right), NTNU (bottom left), and the DIJ (bottom right) © RUB, Moll-Murata / NTNU, Wu / DIJ, Müller

On December 4, the RTG hosted its annual **Equal Opportunity Event**, which this year took place online and featured Associate Professor Dr. Hongwei BAO (University of Nottingham), delivering a lecture and workshop titled “Decolonising Drag: When East Asian Artists Perform Drag”. Following Dr. BAO’s presentation, participants engaged in lively dialogue, reflecting on the gendered, sexual, racial, and political dimensions of drag, both historically and in contemporary diasporic settings.

With doctoral researchers of the first cohort entering their second half of the RTG programme, Mercator Fellow Prof. Hyung-Gu LYNN, PhD, held an **online publishing workshop** for the first cohort of the Research Training Group on December 8. Drawing on his extensive experience as an academic editor of more than sixteen years, Prof. LYNN offered valuable insights into the publication process, tailored to the diverse disciplinary backgrounds of the participants. The workshop addressed both challenges and opportunities in academic publishing and fostered a stimulating dialogue with the group.

In an effort to engage with the general public and communicate key research aspects of the Research Training Group to a non-scientific audience, the RTG conducted a public outreach event, titled “**Visions of the Future in East Asian Cinema**” in March 2026, screening four movies from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan at two cinema locations in Bochum. The screenings explored cinematic visions of the future, with the selected films engaging with questions of technology, society, apocalypse, memory, and imagination. Each screening was introduced and contextualised by the doctoral researchers and Qualifying Fellows, followed by a discussion with the audience. On March 5, the RTG screened the Japanese anime film *Metropolis* (2001) and the Taiwanese genre-bending comedy *Marry My Dead Body* (2022) in cooperation with the Studienkreis Film (SKF) at Ruhr University Bochum. On March 18, the South Korean science fiction anthology *Doomsday Book* (2012) and the Chinese sci-fi comedy *Moon Man* (2022) were presented. This second event was organised in cooperation with the local cinema Endstation Kino. Afterwards, the presenting researchers and fellows wrote up extensive articles on their respective movies, analysing and contextualising approaches to and visions of the future displayed therein, which were published on the RTG’s homepage.

EAF 未來
East Asian Futures



PRESENT

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE IN EAST ASIAN CINEMA

MOVIE SCREENING & DISCUSSION

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026, 4–9 PM
HZO 20, RUB



METROPOLIS
メトロポリス
2001 • Japan



MARRY MY DEAD BODY
關於我和鬼變成家人的那件事
2022 • Taiwan

The movies will be screened in their original language with subtitles.
Admission is free of charge. For more information, visit our website:
east-asian-futures.de/movie-screening



EAF 未來
East Asian Futures



endstation.kino

PRESENT

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE IN EAST ASIAN CINEMA

MOVIE SCREENING & DISCUSSION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026, 4–9 PM
ENDSTATION KINO, BOCHUM



DOOMSDAY BOOK
인류멸망보고서
2012 • South Korea



MOON MAN
独行月球
2022 • VR China

The movies will be screened in their original language with subtitles.
Admission is free of charge. For more information, visit our website:
east-asian-futures.de/movie-screening



The first graduate of the RTG's programme, finished her work soon hereafter: On April 30, 2026, **Youlim KIM**, affiliated researcher with the RTG, successfully defended her doctoral thesis at the Faculty of East Asian Studies of Ruhr University Bochum. Following a brief presentation of her thesis, titled "Transformation and Construction of Social Discourse on Unmarried Mothers in South Korea", Ms. KIM faced the questions of the doctoral committee, consisting of her advisors, Prof. Dr. Marion EGGERT and Prof. Karen SHIRE Ph.D., as well as several other members of the faculty, among them Prof. Dr. Christine MOLL-MURATA and Prof. Dr. Katja SCHMIDTPOTT. After her successful defense, KIM celebrated with her advisors, fellow doctoral researchers and friends on the RUB campus und was later awarded her doctoral certificate at the faculty's Dean's office. The Research Training Group warmly congratulates Youlim KIM for her accomplishment and wishes her all the best for the upcoming publication of her thesis.



Ms. KIM receiving her certificate, together with RTG Speaker Prof. MOLL-MURATA © RUB, Leonow

Following its success in the previous years, the Research Training Group again hosted its **online colloquium series** for a general academic audience, where external researchers are invited to hold lectures on their respective fields of research that pertain

to East Asian conceptions of future. Since the series started in November 2023, the RTG was able to invite 18 scholars to present their research from diverse scientific backgrounds. During the winter term of 2025/26, the colloquium series featured online lectures by Prof. Aaron William MOORE (University of Edinburgh), Prof. Dr. Birgit HOPFENER (Carleton University) and Dr. Rolf SCHEUERMANN (Heidelberg University). In the ongoing summer term of 2026, Dr. Sinan CHU (German Institute for Global and Area Studies) and Prof. Dr. Jens BECKERT (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies) were already hosted, with Prof. BECKERT conducting an in-person colloquium session at the Duisburg campus of the University of Duisburg-Essen. In June, Prof. Dr. Lisa SUCKERT (University of Antwerp), who the RTG was already able to win over for a talk at its inauguration event in 2023, will return with a colloquium session, and in July 2026, Prof. Dr. Sandra MAß, supervisor of former Qualifying Fellow Estella GREEN's doctoral research project, is expected to give another lecture in this series.

Publications

Listed in this overview are publications by members of the Research Training Group GRK 2833 "East Asian Futures" pertinent to the group's research into conceptions of the future in East Asia.

2024

- **Minkyun PARK**, Guk-Bo SIM. "Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Peacebuilding Potential of Pati-Agent" [in Korean], in: *Critical Sociology Association of Korea Conference Proceedings* 8, 2024, pp. 34–38.
- **Christian SCHWERMANN**. "The Ideology of Chao Cuo", in: Yuri PINES (ed.), *Dao Companion to China's fa Tradition: The Philosophy of Governance by Impartial Standards* (Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy 19). Cham: Springer 2024, pp. 181–198.
- **Christian SCHWERMANN**. "Ohne Wagenbruch kein Schiffbruch: Zur möglichen Adaption einer Daseinsmetapher in der chinesischen Literatur", in: Manuel BAUMBACH & Yasmin TEMELLI (eds.), *Schiffbruch: Von Untergängen und Neuanfängen*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 2024, pp. 225–242.
- **Christian SCHWERMANN**. "'State Is Powerful If Its People Are Being Put to [Good] Use': The Invention of Human Resource Management in Ancient China", in: *Journal of Global Slavery* 9, 2024, pp. 166–198.
- **Nora WÖLFING**. "Walking the Earth's Surface in 'territory'", in: *ArtAsiaPacific* (online), May 21, 2024.
- **Nora WÖLFING**. "Rachel Youn's 'Pleasure Circuit'", in: *ArtAsiaPacific* (online), Oct 24, 2024.
- **Nora WÖLFING**. "Von der Brust zur Leinwand", in: *Science Notes* (online), Dec 19, 2024.

2025

- **Aya HINO.** "Epistemic (Dis)Obedience: 'Japanese' Theory, Structural Inequality, and *Kokusai Nihongaku*." In: *Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques* 79(2), 2025, pp. 329–366. DOI: 10.1515/asia-2025-0001.
- **Nora WÖLFING.** "The Young Body Talks Back—Healing, Agency, and Community Building in the Art of Charmaine Poh", in: *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 22, 2025, pp. 22–35.

2026

- **Konrad BÖHM, Charlotte DIRKS, Arne Moritz MEYER, Xiaoyu XIONG, Buyun GONG, Philip MEIß, Liliia PEICHEVA, Anna-Maria RAU, Martyna SZOJA.** "Swinging a Striking Hammer for the Future of the Earth", in: *East Asian Futures* (online), May 20, 2026.
- **Pao-wen HUANG, Ming-Feng WU, Lea WALLRAFF.** "Perspectives on the future in the Taiwanese film 'Marry my Dead Body'", in: *East Asian Futures* (online), May 20, 2026.
- **Hiroataka KOBAYASHI, Denise MUßMANN, Lara SEEGER.** "Welcome to the Future! A Retrospective on our "Metropolis" Viewing Event", in: *East Asian Futures* (online), May 20, 2026.
- **Aman VERMA, Eetu LAUSTELA, Minkyun PARK, Seoyeon HAN, Youlim KIM.** "On Doomsday Book (Illyu myeolmang bogoseo, 2012)", in: *East Asian Futures* (online), May 20, 2026.
- **Gug Bo SIM and Minkyun PARK.** "Pati-Agent: Rethinking the Suffered Being in Apocalypses", in: Samantha GAMEZ & Julia PALMIANO FEDERER (eds.), *Apocalyptic Imaginaries and the Future of Peace: Decolonial and Critical Approaches*. Berlin: Springer 2026, pp. 81–103.
- **Richard J. COOK, Igor SEVENARD and Mateus BILHAR.** "The visualisation of international relations: Using film as pedagogical scaffolding", in: *Politics* 0(0), 2026, pp. 1–19. DOI: 10.1177/026339572614464.
- **Igor SEVENARD.** "Democratisation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Digital Authoritarianism? China's Large Language Model (LLM) Strategy and the Challenge to

Western AI Dominance", in: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 2026, pp. 1–24. DOI: 10.1177/18681026261434029.

- **Igor SEVENARD**, Richard J. COOK and Mateus BILHAR. "Space Race 2.0: The Competition for the Future Operating System of Space", in: *The Diplomat* (online), Feb 16, 2026.
- **Igor SEVENARD**. "Mutual Norm Socialization through Knowledge-Security Restrictions in Sino-German Academic Cooperation", in: *Asian Review of Political Economy* 5(1), 2026, pp. 1–22. DOI: 10.1007/s44216-026-00072-0.

Individual activities

This section includes activities conducted by doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, sorted alphabetically, since the previous issue of the Activity Report in late 2025. A full overview of activities may be found on the RTG's website

Konrad BÖHM (Doctoral Researcher)

Funded Excursions

- ECPR Methods School “Political Ethnography: Method, Sensibility, Writing”, online, organized by the European Consortium for Political Research, Feb 16–20, 2026.

Buyun GONG (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Xinwenhuayundong shiqi de guanli xiandaixing: Hou zibenzhuyi weilai yu laodong wutuobang” [Managerial Modernity during the New Culture Movement: A Post-Capitalist Future and the Utopia of Labor]. Workshop “East Asian Futures”, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, Nov 5, 2026.
- “Taylorization of the Government: The Chinese Administrative Efficiency Movement in the 1930s”. 2026 Business History Conference “Co-Creation”, The Business History Conference (BHC), Imperial College London, UK, Mar 28, 2026.

Funded Excursions

- XXXVI. DVCS Annual Conference “Selbstbilder – Fremdbilder”, Hamburg University, Germany, Nov 21–23, 2025.

Dr. Aya HINO (Postdoctoral Researcher)

Fellowships and Research Stays

- Apr–Jun 2026. Visiting Fellowship, Faculty of Arts, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.
- Sep–Oct 2024. Fieldwork in Japan, German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ), Tokyo, Japan.

Guest Lectures

- “‘Narrating Japan as Japanese to those outside?’ Kokusai Nihongaku and Categories of Knowledge”. Satsuma Chair Guest Lecture, Faculty of Arts, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, Apr 30, 2025.
- “A future that remoulds the past: An introduction to the studies of past futures in East Asia”. Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca’ Foscari University, Venice, Italy, Oct 7, 2025.
- “Epistemic Encounters”. Japanese History Colloquium, Faculty of Arts, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, May 5, 2026.
- “Ideology, Utopia, and Chronopolitics of the Japanese Empire”. In the BA Course “Close Reading and Critical Discussion of New Research in Japanese Studies,” Faculty of Arts, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, May 7, 2026.

Conferences and Workshops

- Panel Chair for “Cybercrime in a Digitalized Japan: Risks, Responses, and Implications for the Future”. British Association for Japanese Studies (BAJS) 2025 – 50th Anniversary Conference, Cardiff University, United Kingdom, Sep 4, 2025.
- “An Imagined Future, Disappearing Futures.” Fieldwork Result Workshop, GRK 2833 “East Asian Futures”, Herne, Germany, Oct 9, 2025.
- “Chronopolitics, Temporalities, and Future Imaginary of the Japanese Empire.” German Association for Social Science Research on Japan (VSJF) Annual Conference, Fachgruppe Geschichte, Vienna, Austria, Nov 7, 2025.
- “The Temporality of Utopia: A Case of the Japanese Empire.” Workshop “East Asian Futures”, German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ), Tokyo, Japan, Nov 13, 2025.

Pao-wen HUANG (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Taiwan’s Tariff Policy in the 1950s: Future Risk and Uncertainty after GATT Withdrawal”. Workshop “‘Dongya/weilai’ yanliu. Boshisheng xueshu jiaoliu luntan” [Graduate Student Forum on East Asia and Futures Studies], National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan, Nov 10, 2025.

- "The Taiwan Customs Commissioners and Shifting Tariff Policies in Japanese Colonial Rule (1895–1909)". AAS Annual Conference 2026 Association of Asian Studies, Vancouver, Canada, Mar 13, 2026.
- "Tariff Reform Under Martial Law: Taiwan's Trade Policy and Visions of the Future". The 23rd Conference of the European Association of Taiwan Studies "Echoes of Authority: Forty Years on from the Eve of the Lifting of Martial Law", Portsmouth, UK, Apr 1, 2026.

Funded Excursions

- Conference "The World Economic History Congress", organised by the International Economic History Association, Lund University, Sweden, Jul 28 – Aug 1, 2025.

Youlim KIM (Aff. Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- "Framing unmarried mothers in Korea: Development of Social discourse through field transgressions across media and literature". The 18th Kyujanggak International Symposium on Korean Studies, Seoul National University, South Korea, Nov 6–8, 2025.
- "Framing Shifts in Abortion Discourse: Newspaper coverage of the South Korean Government's abortion and demographic projection". Workshop "East Asian Futures at the DIJ Tokyo", German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo, Japan, Nov 13, 2025.
- "Literary Representations and Discursive Resonance of Unmarried Mothers in South Korea, 1960-2010s". Workshop "Portrayals of mothers in Korean and Japanese literature: From premodern to contemporary" organized by Barbara WALL, Shiho TAKAI and Youlim KIM, University of Kopenhagen, Denmark, Feb 25–26, 2026.

Media Appearances

- Newspaper interview, published as part of Anna RUHLAND: "Männer? Nee, lass mal!", in: *fluter*. (online), Apr 28, 2025.

Eetu LAUSTELA (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Contemporary North Korean Depictions of the Future in the ‘Socialist Civilization’ Discourse”. The 16th ISKS International Conference of Korean Studies: A Multipolar World and Korean Studies, International Society for Korean Studies (ISKS), National University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Aug 18–20, 2025.
- “Futures under Socialism: North Korean Visions of ‘Socialist Civilization’ in the Kim Jong-un Era”. Workshop “East Asian Futures”, Nankai University, Tianjin, China, Nov 3, 2025.
- “State Planning for the 21st Century: Adaptation and Future Visions in North Korea’s Five-Year Plans 2016–2026”. The 9th Annual Conference of the Social Science Korean Studies Network in Europe (SoKEN), University of Turku, Finland, Apr 10, 2026.

Arne Moritz MEYER (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “The Illusion of Great Power Competition? China’s Post-Colonial Socialist Identity and Outer Space Cooperation (Tiangong-3)”. International Authors’ Workshop “Contesting Roles in World Politics: Great Power Identity and the Making of Global Order”, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany, May 13, 2026.

Funded Excursions

- Spring School “Outer Space Cooperation in the Middle East”, organized by the The Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies (CASSIS), Bonn University, Germany, May 17–19, 2026.

Lilii PEICHEVA (Aff. Doctoral Researcher)

Funded Excursions

- ECPR Methods School: Survey Design, online, organized by the European Consortium for Political Research, Feb 25–27, 2026.

Dr. Qinqin PENG (Aff. Postdoctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Zhongguo fojiao zhong de ‘bian’ guannian jiqi xiandai zhuanxing” [The Concept of “Change” in Chinese Buddhism and Its Modern Transformation]. Workshop “East Asian Futures”, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, Nov 5, 2026.
- “Geyi (Matching Concepts): A Modern Narrative in Chinese Buddhist Historiography”. AAS Annual Conference 2026 Association of Asian Studies, Vancouver, Canada, Mar 15, 2026.

Research Activities

- Participation in the Interdisciplinary workshop “Biographies of Chinese Buddhists in Past and Present”, University of Hamburg, Germany, Feb 14–15, 2025.

Anna-Maria RAU (Aff. Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Minguo shiqi xiandai yinyue lunshu zhong de weilai gouxiang” [Visions of the Future in Modern Music Discourse During the Republican Era]. Workshop “East Asian Futures”, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, Nov 5, 2026.

Igor SEVENARD (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “The Domestic-International Nexus of China’s Global Community of Shared Future”. Workshop “East Asian Futures”, Nankai University, Tianjin, China, Nov 3, 2025.
- “Shaping the Future: The Global Community of Shared Future as Identity-Forming Construct or Sloganistic Narrative Strategy?”. 5th Conference on Asian Studies by the German Association of Asian Studies (DGA), Bonn University, Germany, Sep 10, 2025.
- Panel Organiser for “The Indo-Pacific’s Contested Future: Identity Formation, Domestic Politics and Conflict Prevention Amid China-US Strategic Competition”. 5th Conference on Asian Studies by the German Association of Asian Studies (DGA), Bonn University, Germany, Sep 10, 2025.

Martyna SZOJA (Aff. Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “China’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Non-Proliferation Policy”. 10th edition Nuclear History Summer Camp, Nuclear Proliferation International History Project (NPIHP) and Hiroshima Organization for Global Peace (HOPE), University of Hiroshima, Japan, Oct 6–16, 2025.
- “China’s New Role in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime: SDG 16 & SDG 17”. 3rd UNITAR International Research Conference (3UIRC), United Nations Development Programme office, Brussels, Belgium, Dec 3–4, 2025.
- “Between Doctrine and Practice: China’s Nuclear Policy and Its Challenges for Disarmament Diplomacy”. 3rd National Scientific Conference “Challenges of Modern Diplomacy”, University of Lodz, Poland, May 14, 2026.
- “China and Nuclear Non-Proliferation in Central Asia: Norms, Influence, and Regional Security Dynamics”. National Scientific Conference “Inne stany: Azja Centralna” [Other States: Central Asia], Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław, Poland, May 15, 2026.

Funded Excursions

- EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium / SIPRI intensive course “WMD non-proliferation and disarmament in a changing world”, online, organized by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the European Union Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium (EUNPDC), Jan 20–23, 2026.
- ECPR Methods School “Critical Discourse Analysis”, online, organized by the European Consortium for Political Research, Feb 16–20, 2026.
- 11th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), New York, USA, Apr 27 – May 9, 2026 (moderator of the side event “Nuclear Risks and Risk Reduction” on Apr 27; speaker at the Mayors for Peace Youth Forum on Apr 28, speaker at the UN “Youth Leaders Acting for Disarmament” on May 1; member on three delegations: Middle East Treaty Organization (METO), Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and

Disarmament (PNND) and the UNODA Youth Leader Fund for the World without Nuclear Weapons).

Lea WALLRAFF (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “History as a Resource for the Future: Agricultural Reforms and Reception of Antiquities in Late Imperial and Early Republican China”. XXXVIth Annual Conference „Selbstbilder– Fremdbilder“ of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Chinastudien e.V. (DVCS), University of Hamburg, Germany, Nov 21, 2025.

Nora WÖLFING (Aff. Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Durch den Nebel – Qiu Shihua, Maler der Leere”. Museum unter Tage, Bochum, Germany, Feb 15, 2026.

Teaching Assignments

- “Medienkunst in und aus China – Zwischen Technik-Optimismus und spekulativem Storytelling”. Seminar, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany, Summer Term 2026.

Ming-Feng WU (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- “Buddhification as Future-Making: Buddhist New Youth Movement in 1920s–1930s Republican China”. XXIII IAHR World Congress, International Association for the History of Religions, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, Aug 24–30, 2025.
- Participant in “Roundtable: Decolonization and the Study of East Asian Religion”, chaired by Prof. Satoko FUJIWARA, PhD. XXIII IAHR World Congress, International Association for the History of Religions, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, Aug 26, 2025.

- "Contested Awakening: Buddhist Concepts in Modern China's Reform Discourse". Workshop "How Buddhist Studies Became an Academic Discipline in Modern East Asia?", National Chengchi University, Taipei, online, Oct 29, 2025.
- "When Buddhism Encounters 'the Future': Between Religious and Secular Discourse in Japan and China at the Turn of the 20th Century". Workshop "'Dongya/weilai' yanliu. Boshisheng xueshu jiaoliu luntan" [Graduate Student Forum on East Asia and Futures Studies], National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan, Nov 10, 2025.
- "Engaging the Secular: Conceptions of the Future in Modern Chinese Buddhism". CERES Forschungskolloquium, Center for Religious Studies (CERES), Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, Feb 2, 2026.

Funded Excursions / Fieldwork

- 6th Chung-Hwa International Conference on Buddhism, organised by the Chung-Hwa Institute for Buddhist Studies, GIS Convention Center, Taipei, Taiwan, Oct 30 – Nov 1, 2025.
- Visits to the National Diet Library (NDL) and the Religious Department at the University of Tokyo, Japan, Nov 2025.

Xiaoyu XIONG (Doctoral Researcher)

Presentations

- "Teacher Policy and Regime Security in China: Co-evolution of Quality and Morality Discourse". Workshop „Social and Psychological Factors of Mass Support for Authoritarianism“, European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), Innsbruck, Austria, Apr 8, 2026.

Researchers & Staff

Doctoral Researchers (Cohort I)

Buyun GONG

Scientific Management in Republican China: How the Future was Made Plannable

Focusing on the history of Taylorism in Republican China from the 1910s to 1940s, this dissertation seeks to understand how the future was made plannable in the workplace and in larger economic and societal contexts by investigating three main areas:

1. Historical conditions. Under which historical conditions was Taylorism introduced and practised in Republican China? To which problems was Taylorism a solution?
2. Emergence of a plannable future. How was the future *made* plannable through scientific management? This question is to be approached with empirical case studies at different levels from work planning over welfare system to macro-economic planning.
3. Sociopolitical Effects. How did Taylorist style of work system shape the temporality of work-place and of worker's body? How did it influence work-related welfare system and labour policies in general?

A central methodological premise underlying the proposed dissertation is a hypothesis of 'doing future'. From a perspective of practice theory, the future is neither an objective 'thing', nor a subjective perception in individuals' minds. Instead, as a lived temporality, it is always enacted in doing. Another premise is that planning practices have constituted prevalent future-making practices since Western modernity. Republican China witnessed a similar temporal shift from an expectable future to a plannable future. On this basis, this dissertation seeks to broaden the analytical focus from future conceptions to heterogeneous future-making practices. It attempts to untangle the discursive, bodily, affective and material dimensions of how the future was made plannable.



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Pao-wen HUANG

Tariffs and Future Anticipation: Customs Policies and Practices in Taiwan, 1850–1990

The Chinese maritime customs, established in the latter half of the 19th century, developed a management method containing modern statistical and accounting concepts with the help of foreign experts. This led to an increase in customs revenues, but China did not entirely adopt Western financial management methods. As a result, two different management methods co-existed both in China and Taiwan.



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After the opening of ports in the 1860s, Taiwan gradually gained independence from Fujian Province with the support of tariff revenue and was eventually declared a province in 1885. The cession of Taiwan to Japan by the Qing dynasty in 1895 resulted in the termination of the previous customs system. However, after Taiwan came under the control of the Republic of China in 1945, the customs administration experienced a revival until 1991.

Once a symbol of progress during the Qing Dynasty, it became a vestige of the past during the Republic of China's rule in Taiwan. The differing attitudes of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party towards this institution had direct impact on the different economic and trade development in present-day Taiwan and China.

My research will focus on ideas of future and modernity in fiscal and economic policies influenced by the West and the clash with the traditional Chinese fiscal systems and shed light on the factors that have contributed to the gradual socioeconomic divergence between Taiwan and China.

Youlim KIM (affiliated researcher)

Transformation and Construction of Social Discourse on Unmarried Mothers in South Korea

There has been a pervasive social discourse of stigmatising unmarried mothers in South Korea (Korea, hereafter). Sexual immorality is a prominent stigma that unmarried mothers are accused of and they have had to put great effort to erase the stigma. However, the personal experience of unmarried mothers in South Korea is not merely their individual stories, but the reflected history of colonial, post-colonial, nationalistic and patriarchal society.



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The term *Mihonmo* (unmarried mother) first appeared in print media in the late 60s and early 70s. Since then, the media has consolidated its way of describing unmarried mothers using repetitive language and symbols. Likewise, Korean novels after the Korean War occasionally depicted unmarried mothers; they were sometimes portrayed as poor war widows, indiscriminately sexually active figures, such as *yang-gongju* (western princess), mentally unstable, or disabled women. Various legislative measures from the 1950s also contained many discriminative elements against unmarried mothers and served as a means to restrain their bodies, sexuality, and motherhood.

This study examines articulations on unmarried mothers in the media and literary texts, and legal measures that influenced unwed mothers' legal status from the 60s to understand the development of social discourse on unwed mothers in Korea. Therefore, the interplay of fields of politics, media and literature which forms a dynamic triangular relationship is mainly explored. Moreover, unmarried mothers' projection for the future is analysed in relationship to their societal experience and pursuit of their agency.

This research project proposes that the field of literature tends to generate more liberating and challenging discourse on gendered norms, compared to the media. By delving into unwed mothers' hopes, desires, and aspirations for the future, this study ensures that the voices of unmarried mothers can be empowered by the literature.

Eetu LAUSTELA

North Korean Depictions of the Future in Text Publications of the Kim Jong-un Era



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North Korea is commonly portrayed as a Stalinist curiosity, a state economically and ideologically frozen in time. External narratives about its future are thus often confined to imagining either prolonged stagnation or hypothesized radical transformation, either through collapse or major reform. However, beyond these outsider perspectives, the North Korean state actively constructs and disseminates its own visions of its future(s) as all states do. The primary question this thesis addresses is what key characteristics are associated with the future in contemporary North Korea. The research is conducted by using qualitative content analysis on a variety of data sets from North Korean publications. The materials consist of domestic non-fiction texts in the Korean language, such as future-oriented news media and political writings, from the period of 2012–2023, the first decade of Kim Jong-un's rule.

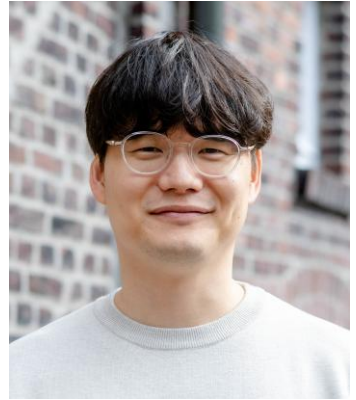
The focus of the research is on what the North Korean state hopes, wants, and expects from its own future, and what qualities it associates with modernity, progress and development. By focusing on the contemporary future visions in North Korea, this research explores North Korea's ideology, historical evolution, and adaptive strategies in response to contemporary challenges and global political shifts. Additionally, the research also provides a better picture of how these aspirations shape the ideological worldview communicated to its citizens and help to maintain the state's legitimacy. Finally, this study also analyzes the contemporary usage of "socialism" as part of North Korea's future-making efforts, highlighting both continuity and changes in the political concept by contrasting the current future projections with the past 'socialist futures' from North Korea and other socialist states.

Minkyun PARK

Divided Self, Divided Future: Narrative Contestation and Politics of Foreign Policy Oscillation with the Case of South Korea's Relations with Japan

South Korea (Korea) has long been regarded as a shrimp between two whales – China and Japan. Due to its dramatic economic growth, democratization and recent K-pop fever around the globe, it starts to be recognized as a shrimp that turned into a whale. What is puzzling, however, is that it seems to still struggle between China and Japan with regard to its identity, resulting in an insecure shrimp inside.

South Korea presents a unique case for ontological security perspectives or identity perspective in general. Its modern history is full of identity shifts. Before Japanese colonialism in 1910, it was regarded as a subordinate state under Chinese empire. Then under Japanese colonialism, Korea was branded with colonial identity. During the Cold War, anti-communism was staged by the state as the core of its identity due to the Korean War. My assumption is that identity was rather given or forced to South Korea before its democratization in 1987 either through China, Japan, the U.S. and/or its own dictators. And it was only after 1987 that as a democracy, there has been a rise of politics of Korean Identities and Selves, including perceptions of a self-assertive future. Since democratization there have been often shifts of governments between progressives and conservatives, which hold different views on what it means to be Korean and towards its neighbouring countries – China and Japan. Its enduring problems with these relationships will be analysed in this study with a view of the impact of future perceptions for ontological security and insecurity.



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Elisabeth RACHSTEIN

Legitimation and the Resilience of Authoritarian Rule: A Comparative Study of Russia and North Korea

This dissertation examines how authoritarian regimes construct narratives to legitimate political authority and stabilise their rule, and conceptualises legitimation as a discursive process structured by temporal ordering. It argues that legitimation narratives are not merely a background dimension of political resilience but a central resource of authoritarian power.



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Theoretically, the project advances the claim that authoritarian regimes stabilise their rule by embedding political authority in teleological narratives that fuse past, present, and future into a single, morally charged trajectory of historical necessity. Through such narratives, the future is no longer framed as an open horizon of political alternatives but as a predetermined continuation of a sanctioned past, thereby narrowing the space of imaginable change. Methodologically, the study employs critical discourse analysis of state-controlled media and official political communication. A comparative design is used to analyse North Korea and Russia. These two regimes differ markedly in ideology, institutional structure, and international positioning, yet display striking similarities in their strategies of legitimation. The analysis focuses on how narratives are mobilised to construct a circular logic in which past sacrifices legitimise present hardship, while promised futures retrospectively justify both past and present.

The central finding is that both regimes organise political time as a narrative loop. The past is invoked to naturalise the present, and the future is portrayed as the inevitable fulfilment of an already determined historical mission. Authoritarian discourse effectively “colonises” the future, depriving it of contingency and political openness. By framing political development as preordained, alternative trajectories are rendered inconceivable. By foregrounding narratives of legitimation, this dissertation contributes to research on authoritarian resilience, discursive legitimation, and the politics of time.

Anna-Maria RAU (affiliated researcher)

Modern Chinese Music and the Nation

In the wake of the Republican Period (1912–1949) the contact with European, or more broadly, Western music began to increase and with its growing presence musicians in the Chinese cultural context began to incorporate and infuse those foreign styles with elements of Chinese culture. This in turn brought up questions about the place of foreign, native and fused forms of music in the Chinese cultural sphere and made room for discussions on new Chinese music.



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Therefore, it is of interest to examine which ideas of political, ideological or artistic nature were expressed in the writings of members within music circles. The regional focus will be on the cities Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong as these were the major cities in which the examined phenomena of music occurred and discourse took place. Examining this should give answers to why this synthesis was created, as well as provide helpful insights to the following questions: Why was it deemed necessary to modernise this area of culture within national music circles and how did they argue in favour of these changes? What were the intentions, how were they realised and how did professional circles respond? Were there any counter currents?

To further discuss and answer these questions a selection of primary sources will be examined. The sources for this study can be divided into four categories, namely newspapers and magazines, texts from and about influential figures, texts from and about institutions of the music industry, and records of music. Especially journals specialised on music allow tracing strands of arguments within the discourse.

Further sources are biographies and collected writings by the discourse's participants. The participants in question were not only notable figures working in the creation and reproduction of music, but also working in distributive and commercial functions in the music industry. Thereby the dissertation will offer new perspectives on the art of sound and meanings attached to it in times of competing political stances.

Igor SEVENARD

The Genesis of a Global “Community of Common Destiny” – A Conceptualization of Chinese Worldmaking

The concept of a ‘Community of Common Destiny’ has emerged in the Chinese discourse and created conceptions of the future as well as worlds of imagination (Vorstellungswelten) as this concept does not yet reflect global reality. Further research on the subject may help elucidate how discourse worlds (Diskurswelten), transnationally networked social actors, and specific contexts in different localities shape conceptions of future and world order. Being deeply integrated within global structures since China’s reform and opening period, China has developed significant discourse power at home and abroad.

This project asks the questions of how Chinese diplomacy has created the concept of a ‘Community with a Shared Future for Mankind’, which purposes it serves, and which developments in meaning this term has seen in China and abroad. The project will argue, that while the ‘Community of Common Destiny’ is a global concept applicable to the whole of humanity, it is of imagination and not of reality. Rather than fixed development paths, it constitutes a rewriting of world order. In particular, the concept of ‘Community of Common Destiny’ has a significant impact on China’s approach towards climate change and its stance on environmental sustainability as well as Global Health through the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative. The project thus aims to investigate the role of the concept in shaping China’s approach to global governance and its interactions with other nations, examining the influence of China’s governance model on other regions.



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Nora WÖLFING (affiliated researcher)

Visions of Futurity in Contemporary Art from the Sinophone Region

Since the 2010s, depictions of the future have been an important part of contemporary art from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese-speaking diaspora. In the portrayal of the future, the artworks of numerous artists contain comparable narratives and images, with digital techniques frequently used for execution. These artworks visually and narratively



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recur to aspects or moments of Chinese history. This dissertation examines the historical references and political entanglements within the works and their positioning in the global art discourse in the context of solo and group exhibitions. Special focus is given to modes of narrativity within the artworks and the exhibitions, as well as different modes of temporality that come to play within the artworks as well as in the exhibition setting.

The growing international interest and reputation of Chinese science fiction literature is a parallel development to the emergence of the body of artworks that chose science fiction narrative modes for their artistic storytelling. The specific interest in history and appeal to traditional visuality constructs multitemporal narration and blurs preconceived "temporal registers" (Assmann 2020), which gives the artworks the potential to broaden the discourse about futurity, the construction of history and linear perception of time. Moreover, the artworks highlight the importance that storytelling and fiction (Wang 2020) have in contemporary China. Here the artworks function as highly volatile vehicles for storytelling within the contemporary *exhibitionism* (Bal 2021) and the *exhibitionary complex* (Bennett 1994) and positions them at the intersection of presentation of individual articulation and representation of what Jane Chin Davidson referred to as "Staging Chineseness" (Davidson 2020).

Ming-Feng WU

**Engaging the Secular: Conceptions of the Future
in Modern Chinese Buddhism**



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This project aims to contribute to the EAF program's objectives by examining the Confucian-Buddhist debate and modern Chinese Buddhist thought in the context of the conceptions of the future in East Asia. Specifically, this study will explore how the Confucian-Buddhist debate has shaped modern Buddhist

writing in China, influencing scholars' thinking about self and society, the relationship between Buddhism and modern society, and the interpretation of Buddhist texts. Modern Buddhist writings from the 20th century often feature comparisons between Confucianism and Buddhism, as well as integrations of their respective ideologies. Through these efforts, Buddhists have sought to offer a path towards enlightenment that is applicable to a secular society. Hence, to understand how Buddhist scholars view the relationship between individuals and society in modern times, we must examine the ideological context of the Confucian-Buddhist controversy.

The views about and conceptualizations of the future at personal, national, and global levels will be analysed through the lenses of language, religion, and ideology, and the carriers of future conceptions, including individuals, groups, and larger collectives. Through this research, I aim to contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of ideas of political participation, nationalism, and egalitarianism in East Asia over the twentieth century, and demonstrate how self-identity and social class influenced views of the future and informed the role of Buddhism in shaping the future.

Doctoral Researchers (Cohort II)

Konrad BÖHM

Propagating Chinese Visions of Order: Investigation into the Dissemination of Chinese IR Theories

Chinese International Relations (IR) experts at universities and think tanks play a central role in shaping the perception of Chinese foreign policy within and outside China. Prominent among them are scholars engaged in the construction of “Chinese Schools of IR Theory,” a research program that explicitly draws on Chinese political thought and historical experience to challenge the dominance of Western IR theory and to conceptualize a ‘just’ global order.



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My project examines how Chinese Schools of IR Theory construct and disseminate narratives of a future global order, interrogating the relationship between academic knowledge production and foreign policy. It asks what purpose the label “Chinese Schools of IR Theory” serves and which scholars it includes or excludes, what narratives of a future global order these scholars advance, how institutional settings and funding structures shape their theories, and how their narratives are strategically tailored and disseminated to domestic and international audiences.

Guided by Strategic Narrative Analysis, the project pays particular attention to the temporal dimension of these narratives — how past, present, and future are mobilized to legitimize a particular vision of global order. To investigate both the textual and material dimensions of this knowledge production, it combines Qualitative Content Analysis of scholarly publications, Discourse Network Analysis of academic and institutional ties, and Political Ethnography conducted during an extended fieldwork stay.

My research contributes to the subtheme “Future Realizations of Sovereignty and Governance” of the Research Training Group, developing its interest in how intellectuals construct utopian and dystopian visions of a future regional and international order.

Seoyeon HAN

Beyond Eurocentric Modernity: Religious Temporalities and Future Imaginations in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Korea

Scholars often distinguish between linear, cyclical, and spiral models of time; yet no culture or tradition can be reduced to a single temporal pattern. Examining how historical actors envisioned the future makes this plurality especially visible, as future-oriented discourse brings together different understandings of how time flows. Approaching such future imaginaries in East Asia offers a way to reconfigure narratives of modernity and reveals the coexistence and interaction of multiple temporalities.

This study investigates how different religious and national groups imagined their own and communal future in the arena of Korea and interacted on the intercultural level. Focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allows for close observation of the complex dynamics among diverse religious groups (Buddhist, Christian, Chōndoi, and Neo-Confucian) and among different nations (Korea, Japan, China, and Western imperial powers).

By showing that multiple temporal models coexisted and overlapped within religious groups, this study expands discussions on modernity through a religious lens and via East Asian visions of the future. For example, while future-oriented concepts of progress and reform were often framed by linear temporality in technological or economic spheres, they were also actively shaped by the cyclical and spiral temporalities of religious and aesthetic contexts. These multifaceted visions of time were not developed in isolation but were forged through intense historical shifts. Although colonial pressures deeply influenced Korea's modern era, the peninsula also served as a hub for wider transregional entanglements. Through encounters with China and Japan, Korean actors reflected on Western models while cultivating a sense of East Asia, envisioning futures that were shaped by unique political dynamics.



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Hiroataka KOBAYASHI

Utopia – Dystopia. Beneficent and Adverse Visions of the Future in Late Qing and Early Republican China (ca. 1885–1915)

The intended research project is aimed to explore utopian and dystopian worldviews in China in the crucial period of China's rite de passage to modernity in the thirty years from ca. 1885–1915. Accordingly, the project is structured into two parts, with the emphasis clearly being put onto the second part, in which elements of dystopian worldviews are detected and subjected to analysis. The protagonist of this second part is Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936). The focus will be placed on three treaties written by Zhang between 1899 and 1907 and an accumulated poem depicting contemporary Japanese society. As to the three selected treatises, the third one, "Discussing the Five Nothings" ("Wuwulun", 1907), may be regarded as a full-blown dystopia in miniature. It is suspected that this treatise was written in response to what was known at that time about the Book of the Great Unity (Datongshu) by Kang Youwei (1858–1927), the protagonist of the first part and "without a doubt the most powerful figure of China's convoluted history of 'utopian' thinking" (W. Bauer). Being translated into English in 1958, followed by translations into French and German, the Book of the Great Unity has widely received attention by researchers. Yet, the intended study seeks to expand our knowledge about this work in two respects. The opening sections of the two parts exploring utopian and dystopian worldviews, respectively, are each followed by three further sections. In these sections, the focus is being directed to three other fields: fictional literature, pictorial materials, and contemporary discourse in Japan. While a substantial corpus of research literature can be made use of for the first part, it is with the investigations in the second part that the intended study hopes to make a significant contribution to the emergence of utopian writing and thinking in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China by tracing dystopian visions and concepts.



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Arne Moritz MEYER

China as a new Global Space Power: A Role Analysis in the Context of Global Leadership Competition in the Area of Outer Space



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China's recent outer space programs have emerged as a symbol of the country's technological and geopolitical advancement, sparking strong interest by media, scientists and politicians alike. This thesis proposal explores whether China is actively pursuing a global leadership role in outer space and provides methods to evaluate its ability to enact this role. It provides an overview over the current debate on China and its ambitions in outer space exploration and highlights the divide between positions on a potential US-China space race. By examining China's prominent outer space programs and comparing them to similar programs conducted by other states, the proposal develops an approach based on a role theory framework. Utilizing this framework, the proposal highlights the aspects of external perception, self-perception and identity, and the capacity to act based on four leadership auxiliary roles; pioneer, agenda-setter, representant and mediator. The future thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current order in outer space, a possible new Chinese global leadership role and its implications for international leadership dynamics.

Liliia PEICHEVA (affiliated researcher)

Taking Sides or Staying Neutral: Making Sense of China's Neutrality in International Conflicts

In times of apparent disintegration of the global world order, the question of what constitutes national sovereignty and responsibility is more pertinent than ever. Despite the existence of the common security under the United Nations, there have always been times when countries have unilaterally interfered in other countries' affairs through military action or economic pressure, thus abrogating their sovereignty. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the USA's economic pressure on Cuba and military intervention in Iran and Venezuela are just the most recent examples. Thus, the main question is whether sovereignty is sacrosanct and, if so, whose sovereignty and under what circumstances it can be violated.

According to international law, all countries are equal, and interference is only permitted under special circumstances, which are not present in the aforementioned examples. China's 5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which it claims are anchored in international law, forbid interference and the violation of state sovereignty. In fact, this stance is viewed as neutrality by much of the global community. However, Western scholarly debate on the topic, as well as a debate among Chinese intellectuals, chip away at this image of neutrality. Additionally, analyses of various conflicts show that China does not strictly apply its neutrality but rather finds creative ways to interpret it.

When certain norms and laws seem to disappear or weaken, the question emerges as to what is considered normal in the present time and space. This dissertation aims to trace changes in China's application and understanding of neutrality and the expectations and perceptions of other countries regarding China's position. Ultimately, it seeks to understand what is normal and expected of China in terms of interference in international conflicts. More generally, however, the dissertation seeks to trace the role of neutrality and its future potential in global security.



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Martyna SZOJA (affiliated researcher)

The People's Republic of China's Weapons of Mass Destruction Non-Proliferation Policy: Analysis and Future Directions



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The global Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) non-proliferation regime (NPR) is currently facing significant pressure. In this context, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is not only a participant in the NPR but is also increasingly positioning itself as its defender and (potential) leader. This is clearly articulated in the White Paper *China's Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in the New Era* (2025), where the PRC presents itself as a responsible leader, a supporter of UN-centered multilateralism, and a proponent of a reformed global order embedded in its broader Global Initiatives framework.

Against this background, this research project critically examines the PRC's WMD non-proliferation policy, focusing on the gap between its discursive positioning and its practical behavior. The PRC's contributions have so far had limited tangible impact on strengthening the regime. Moreover, concerns persist regarding the PRC's expanding nuclear arsenal and limited transparency. This raises the question of whether the PRC's engagement with the NPR primarily serves as a tool for projecting the image of a responsible power and shaping international political dynamics, including the reinterpretation of key non-proliferation and disarmament norms.

The project applies National Role Theory (Holsti, 1970) to analyze how the PRC constructs its role within the NPR and how this role is translated into policy and practice. By examining official statements, policy documents, and behavior within international institutions, the research seeks to identify the national role conceptions and normative implications of the PRC's actions. Ultimately, the project aims to assess the PRC's current and future role in the global non-proliferation regime and its broader impact on international peace and security.

Aman VERMA

Future after Empire: Korean Intellectuals and Postcolonial Temporality in the “Liberation Space”, 1945–1950

Existing studies often treat the “Liberation Space” (1945–50) as a transition from colonialism to national division or as a prelude to the Korean War. Such interpretations often cast the Liberation Space as part of a linear historical trajectory. This project instead approaches the Liberation Space as a distinct postcolonial temporal field in which the future remained open, uncertain, and contested. The proposed doctoral thesis will examine how Korean political and literary intellectuals imagined the future after the collapse of Japanese colonial rule, focusing on Korea’s Liberation Space between 1945 and 1950.

The main focus is that the liberation of Korea did not produce a single, settled vision of Korea’s future. Korean intellectuals had to rethink the relationship between their colonial past, the unstable present of liberation, and the anticipated future. Political thinkers and literary writers sought to redefine what Korea should become after the empire. for example, a unified nation, a democratic polity, a socialist society, a morally renewed community, or a culturally regenerated people. These visions were not merely ideological positions. They were also temporal projects that sought to organise an uncertain present, reinterpret colonial memory, and project different possibilities for postcolonial life.

The thesis situates these debates within a longer history of Korean temporal thought, spanning premodern moral and cyclical conceptions of time, late nineteenth-century reformist ideas of progress, and colonial experiences of suspended or foreclosed futurity. By placing temporality at the centre of analysis, this project contests retrospective readings of inevitability. It reconstructs the Liberation Space as a contested arena in which Korean intellectuals imagined, organised, and struggled over possible postcolonial futures before many of those were narrowed or foreclosed.



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Lea WALLRAFF

History as a Resource for the Future: Translation of Agricultural Knowledge and Reception of Antiquities in the Late Qing



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How can a future radically different from any past experiences be made imaginable for present action? This is a question that the reformers of the late Qing faced in their endeavors to modernize China. With research on this period usually focusing on attempts at technological, military or institutional modernization, the agricultural challenges and reform efforts are rarely discussed, even though recurring food shortages posed immense problems. In the eyes of the reformists, further intensifying agriculture with the help of Western methods and knowledge was the only way to increase productivity. Thus, amid the reformist spirit of the 1890s, the first Chinese periodical dedicated exclusively to agriculture, the *Nongxue bao* (1897–1906), was launched. Its authors and editors were confronted with the challenge of making foreign scientific concepts more easily comprehensible for a wide audience – and looked to the past for guidance. This paper examines the translation strategies they employed, especially the use of terms derived from the ancient Chinese context. How did this process of using the old to convey the new impact the translated scientific concepts and, more specifically, their temporality? I argue that the agricultural, economic and political terms drawn from antiquity were first resorted to in order to make the foreign-inspired knowledge and reforms more palatable, underwent significant semantic change in the process and were finally replaced by Japanese neologisms. At the end of this process, the past lost its value as a model for present action, leaving the future as a blank sheet to be inscribed by present actors.

Xiaoyu XIONG

Teaching for the Future: Governance and Autonomy of Teachers in Post-Mao China

Teaching has been closely tied to conceptualizations of the future in post-socialist China. After Chairman Mao's death, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) envisioned a national future distinct from radical Maoism—one centered on modernization and economic development. Correspondingly, the Party-state sought to professionalize teachers so they could contribute to this development plan while still maintaining a degree of political control. With meritocracy replacing egalitarianism as the prevailing social ideology, families increasingly invested in education to secure their children's academic success, which could potentially elevate the family's future prospects. As the state gradually retreated from its total political dominance over the teaching profession, teachers increasingly acted in accordance with their own educational philosophies and worked for the future of their students.

The teaching profession thus occupies a crucial position in how the state, society (particularly families), and teachers themselves imagine the future. This research project examines the circulation and interaction of teacher-related discourses produced by the state, society, and teachers in order to investigate teacher governance and autonomy in post-Mao China.



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Postdoctoral Researchers

Dr. Aya HINO

The Empire's Wilful Malaise: Ideology, Utopia, and Knowledge Production in Japan



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The future of the Japanese Empire envisioned by those at the imperial centre was underpinned by discursive tropes of difference: colonial differences, which distinguished ethnic Japanese from colonial subjects within the empire; and imperial differences, which differentiated Japan's imperial and colonial project from those of European empires. While colonial differences legitimised Japan's subjugation of the other as a necessary means of liberation and progress, imperial differences justified such subjugation as 'humane' compared to the machinations of European empires. This future imaginary was thus at once ideological and utopian. It was ideological because it was so bound to the interests of the imperial centre that it disguised the reality of military conquests, suppression of dissent, oppression codified in socio-cultural lives, and exploitation of resources and labour. Yet it was simultaneously utopian because it was oriented towards the unity of racially, ethnically, and culturally different people of Asia, which was incongruous with reality.

This ideo-utopian nature of the future imaginary, however, escapes the established scholarly language of ideology and utopia. Mannheim, Jameson, Ricoeur, and Marcuse, for example, all argue that the ideological becomes the utopian when it breaks the bounds of the existing order, or, conversely, that the utopian becomes the ideological when it reconceives itself in accord with the interests of the ruling group. Yet their theoretical renderings fall short of accounting for a future imaginary that is all at once ideological and utopian.

How did those at the imperial centre discursively forge the ideo-utopian future and legitimise it as a teleological end of the Japanese Empire, while foreclosing other possibilities? To address this question, this postdoctoral project examines the intersection of

chronopolitics and epistemology. First, the project traces how the future, underpinned by colonial and imperial differences, had been imagined, contested, and instrumentalised, with particular focus on chronopolitics – the ways in which politics intervened in time to establish temporal registers, to constitute relationships among these registers, and to legitimise certain visions while foreclosing others. Second, the project considers the epistemological foundation of chronopolitics, namely the conceptual formation of the ‘Japanese’ subject as a form of collective consciousness and the discursive imbrication of nation and empire that delimited the boundaries of collective consciousness. Third, the project examines how the ideological and the utopian were linked together, by attending to what is called ‘Nihongaku’ – a site of knowledge production and cultural indoctrination tied to the interests of the imperial centre. With empirically grounded analysis, the project seeks to build upon existing theories of ideology and utopia and to propose a new conceptual apparatus, ‘transgression’, that explains the imbrication of ideological and utopian futures.

Dr. Monika ARNOŠTOVÁ
(affiliated researcher)

Current State and Future Projections of the Work Environment for Young Professionals in Urban Areas of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan



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China, Taiwan and Japan are notoriously known for their culture of long working hours which was widely accepted by millennials and earlier generations but not as enthusiastically welcomed by generation Z or younger millennials. Each of these three regions has specific job market conditions for young professionals and the protest actions and ways of refusal of dire working conditions also vary. This prospective study aims at understanding the nature of protests young people adopt in their bargaining power in shaping the overall working conditions for all young workforce. Due to geographical and cultural vicinity, mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan are expected to demonstrate a certain degree of convergence and divergence. The aim of this research is therefore to identify the shared tendencies toward more healthy work arrangements and to offer predictions on how these might shape the overall working conditions for the whole young workforce in this region.

The youth in mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan feel a certain degree of disillusionment and disenchantment with the rat race that should ensure them a bright future. Interestingly enough, the trend of 'lying flat' seems to be a common denominator that occurs in various forms in all three societies. As the three societies find themselves in different stages of social and economic development, divergencies are also expected to emerge. Overtime culture and striving for material wealth do not seem to appeal to all young workforce anymore and our study could shed more light on what kind of countercultures are emerging among young people as a result, what is their take on work-life balance and what kind of work arrangements they might be willing to adopt. Understanding their attitudes could help us to foresee how their take on work and life could possibly change the future of the working environment in East Asian societies.

Dr. Martin GEHLMANN
(affiliated researcher)

A Confucian Future for the Country East of the Sea

The second half of the 19th century brought enormous changes and new challenges to the Korean peninsula. The Chosŏn state, already beset by numerous domestic issues, faced encroachment by Western imperialist powers and under Japanese pressure was forced to reevaluate its relationship with the Qing empire. Korean Confucian thinkers instinctively looked to the past for solutions on how to deal with the looming problems. However, their understanding of that ideal Confucian past reflected current events and discourse. So, by the end of the 19th century, well-established Confucian concepts and ideas were reinterpreted as values and thought fit to build a modern Confucian nation, able to deal with the challenges of an imperialist world.

One example of such an attempt to shape a Korean-centred Confucian tradition for the development of a Korean Confucian nation state can be found in the *Continued Elementary Learning of East of the Sea*, edited by Pak Chaehyŏng (1838–1900) in 1884. Pak's work provides valuable insights into the understanding of Confucianism and Korea's place in its tradition in the late 19th century, as well as a quite particular and never realized concept for a Korean Confucian future. This research project analyses the historical context of Confucianism in Korea and its evolution over time, and it will contribute to ongoing discussions of the present and future of Confucianism in Korea by looking at its historical potential to adapt to modern challenges.



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Dr. Qinqin PENG (affiliated researcher)

The Concept of “Change” in Chinese Buddhism and Its Modern Transformation

In premodern Chinese thought, *change* — “bian” — is understood as the fundamental state of the world and the inescapable situation of life. It has long been a central theme in Chinese philosophy, historiography, and religious writings. Rather than positing an external source for motion and order, Chinese cosmology interprets dynamic organization as implicit in the very nature of beings; it is one facet of the status of individualized things and is also embedded in the relationship between the patterns of nature and specifically human values.

On the one hand, the changes caused by modernity, such as industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and secularization, began to reshape China at both institutional and conceptual levels. On the other hand, modernity is also loaded with new theories, which are mostly universal, linear, normative, and secular, to explain and control change. New intellectual tools, such as science, became powerful, if not dominant, in dealing with changes.

The concept of change is deeply linked with people’s idea of time and their understanding of the past, the present, and the future. In particular, the future, due to its unknowable and unpredictable nature, often maintained a religious orientation. The Buddhist community’s imagination, judgment, and understanding of the future is an example that contributes to a further reflection on how a sustained manner of coping with negative changes has taken shape between secular forces and religious beliefs in early twentieth century China.



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Principal Investigators

Speaker and Co-speaker



Speaker Prof. Dr. Christine MOLL-MURATA (right) and Co-speaker Prof. Dr. Markus Taube (left)
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Speaker Prof. Dr. Christine MOLL-MURATA holds the chair of the History of China at the Faculty of East Asian Studies, Ruhr University Bochum. She specialises in the socio-economic history of China, especially from the Song dynasty to the Republic, as well as the history of Taiwan.

Co-speaker Prof. Dr. Markus TAUBE (co-speaker) holds the Chair of East Asian Economic Studies / China at the Institute of East Asian Studies and the Mercator School of Management, Faculty of Business Administration, University of Duisburg-Essen. He specialises in institutional economics (state-business nexus, industrial policy, informal networks), institutional transfers and policy.

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Prof. Kaori HAYASHI, PhD

University of Tokyo, Japan

Kaori HAYASHI holds the position of Professor of Media and Journalism Studies at the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies of the University of Tokyo. Since 2021, she is Executive Vice President of the University of Tokyo in charge of diversity and global affairs, as well as Director of the B'AI Global Forum. Prior to her academic career, she worked as the Tokyo correspondent for Reuters, and is a contributor and columnist for a variety of media including Asahi Shimbun.



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She specialises in media and journalism studies and in international comparative research on the digitalization of media and the transformation of journalism. Furthermore, her research includes the status of women in journalism, the representation of women in media, and gender justice in the world of media. More recently, her research interests turned towards the just use of AI for the future of digital society.

Her publications include *Media fushin. Nani ga towarete iru no ka* (Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho 2017). Among her recent English publications are "The Silent Public in a Liberal State: Challenges for Japan's Journalism in the Age of the Internet" in the edited volume *The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism. Japan and the World Order*, edited by Yoichi Funabashi and G. John Ikenberry, Brookings Institution Press 2020, and "Gendered power relations in the digital age: An analysis of Japanese women's media choice and use within a global context", published in 2023 in *Feminist Media Studies*.

As Mercator Fellow, she participated in the RTG's Proposal Workshop in June 2024 and the second Virtual Field Retreat in February 2025. Furthermore, she held two workshops in August 2024 at RUB and UDE, respectively, giving presentations "Japanese Media in an Age of Digitization" and providing feedback to the attending doctoral researchers and Qualifying Fellows.

Prof. Hyung-Gu LYNN, PhD

University of British Columbia, Canada

Hyung-Gu LYNN has largely lived and worked in Canada, South Korea, Japan, and the United States during his career. He teaches as the AECL/KEPCO Chair in Korean research in the Department of Asian Studies, the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada, and was the Editor-in-Chief of the multi-disciplinary journal *Pacific Affairs* from 2008 to 2023. Receiving his PhD from Harvard University, he held positions at Hitotsubashi University and Hanyang University before assuming his current position, and has been a visiting scholar at Kyushu University and Seoul National University.



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His areas of expertise are Korean and Japanese research, in particular colonialism, migration, popular culture, politics, international relations, and business history.

Among his publications is his monograph *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas Since 1989*, which was published in English by Zed Books (London 2007) and in Italian by EDT (Roma 2009). He also edited the 4 volumes of *Critical Readings on the Colonial Period of Korea, 1910–1945* (Leiden: Brill 2012).

During his visit as Mercator Fellow in 2024, he gave three public lectures — on Aesthetics in Webtoons and on Mukbang culture at Ruhr University Bochum on June 17 and 18, and on Korean popular music at University of Duisburg-Essen on June 20 — and participated in the RTG's Proposal Workshop in June, 2024, where he provided feedback to the researchers presenting their projects. On December 8, 2025, Prof. LYNN gave an online publishing workshop for members of the first cohort of the RTG.

Prof. em. Brantly WOMACK, PhD

University of Virginia, USA

Brantly WOMACK is Senior Faculty Fellow at the Miller Center of University of Virginia and Professor of Foreign Affairs emeritus of UVA's Department of Politics. From February to April 2023, he taught in Beijing as Boeing Visiting Faculty Chair in International Relations of Schwarzman College, in Tsinghua University.



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His book, *Recentering Pacific Asia: Regional China and World Order*, was published by Cambridge University Press in August 2023. Previous books include *Asymmetry and International Relationships* (Cambridge 2016), *China Among Unequals: Asymmetric International Relationships in Asia* (World Scientific Press 2010), and *of China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge 2006).

He co-edited with Yuk Wah Chan *Borderlands in East and Southeast Asia* (Routledge 2017), with Hao Yufan *Rethinking the Triangle: Washington, Beijing, Taipei* (University of Macau Press and World Scientific Press, 2016), edited *China's Rise in Historical Perspective* (Rowman and Littlefield 2010) and *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge 1991).

Professor WOMACK has visited all thirty-one Chinese provinces, and in 2011 he was given the China Friendship Award for his work with Chinese universities.

As a Mercator Fellow, he sat on a public roundtable discussion on "China in a World of Acute Crises" held by AREA Ruhr in Duisburg on June 5, 2024, and visited a seminar within the module "State and Society in China" held by participating researcher Prof. Dr. Dr. Nele NOESSELT (UDE) on the same day. He also took part in the project's Proposal Workshop in June 2024 and the second Virtual Field Retreat in February 2025, providing his research expertise and guidance to the RTG's doctoral students.

Prof. Lin-Chun WU, PhD

National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

Lin-Chun WU is currently a professor of history at Taiwan Normal University. Her primary interest is modern China history and the postwar Taiwan-U.S. relations. She has been a visiting scholar in Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University and a Fulbright Scholar at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University.



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Her published books include *Meiguo ren weiijing de Zhongguo meng: Qiye, jishu yu guanxi wang* (America's Unfinished China Dream: Business, Technology and Networks), Taipei: Lian Jing, 2020; *Kuaguo jiaozhi xia de diguo mingyun: Jindai shi* (The Fate of Empires under the Intertwining of Nations: Late Qing), Taipei: Lian Jing, 2024; and *Meiguo da qiye yu jindai Zhongguo de guoji hua* (American Big Business and China's Internationalization), Taipei: Lian Jing, 2012.

Her articles in English have appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* and others.

While visiting the RTG in her capacity as Mercator Fellow in 2024, Prof. WU gave two presentations at Ruhr University Bochum on June 4 and 5 concerning the Taiwan Collection of Materials on Modern Chinese and Taiwanese History and the inter-war relations between China and the United States. She also participated in the RTG's Proposal Workshop in June 2024 and the second Virtual Fieldwork Retreat in February 2025.

In April 2026, Professor Wu received the prestigious Distinguished Research Award (Jiechu yanjiujiang 傑出研究獎) from the Taiwanese National Science and Technology Council (Guojia kexue weiyuanhui 國家科學委員會).

Qualifying Fellowships (2025/2026)



Fabian EVERS, Lara SEEGER, Philipp MEIß, Charlotte DIRKS (left to right)

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Charlotte DIRKS, B.A.

Institute of East Asian Studies and Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen

Fabian EVERS, B.A.

Faculty of East Asian Studies, Ruhr University Bochum

Philipp MEIß, B.A.

Institute of East Asian Studies and Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen

Lara SEEGER, B.A.

Faculty of East Asian Studies, Ruhr University Bochum

Coordination & Administration

Simone KORTUNG, M.A./M.Sc.

Scientific Coordinator

Jonas SOHRWEIDE, B.A.

Administrative Coordinator

Jan WIEMANN, B.A.

IT Administrator

Morgane GILLIBERT

Student Assistant (UDE)

Isabelle KOLDEWITZ

Student Assistant (RUB)

Partner institutions

China

- 1) East China Normal University, Faculty of History, Shanghai
- 2) Jilin University, School of Economics, Changchun
- 3) Nankai University, School of Economics, Laboratory for Economic Behavior and Policy Simulation, Centre for Transnational Studies, Tianjin
- 4) Shandong University Institute of International Studies and School of North East Asia Studies, Weihai

Taiwan

- 5) National Taiwan Normal University, College of Liberal Arts, Taipei

Japan

- 6) Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo
- 7) The University of Tokyo, Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, Tokyo
- 8) Hitotsubashi University, Graduate School of Economics, Tokyo
- 9) Kyushu University, Faculty of Humanities, Japanese History and History of Ideas, Fukuoka

South Korea

- 10) Sungkyunkwan University, Department of Korean Language and Literature, Humanities, Seoul
- 11) Seoul National University, Institute for Korean Political Studies, Seoul

Notes



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