

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group



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Practices and rituals of magical control in East Asia

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The resilience and apparent popularity of “non-rational” ritual practices performed for “rational” reasons within the context of late modern society represent an important window into key sociological and anthropological themes surrounding urbanization and modernization. Specifically, the widespread presence of sacred sites like small streetside shrines tucked into urban spaces and the common rituals and prayers folded into modern daily life across East Asia call us to reexamine theoretical assumptions regarding the meanings and forms of “magical” rites and our definitions of rational/non-rational action. Based on fieldwork in Japan and Hong Kong, this talk discusses preliminary reflections on our collaborative research project which looks at this set of issues through the lens of contemporary German theory of social practices (Bartmanski) and American anthropological frameworks (Gagné) and seeks to provide new perspectives on the theoretical and practical implications of the resilience of practices and rituals of magical control in modern societies.

Dominik Bartmanski is Heisenberg Fellow based at the Chair of Cultural Sociology at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. He is the author of *Matters of Revolution: Urban Spaces and Symbolic Politics in Berlin and Warsaw After 1989* (Routledge 2022), co-author of *Labels: Making Independent Music and Vinyl: The Analogue Record in the Digital Age* (Routledge 2020), and the co-editor of *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life* (Springer 2012). He is currently a Guest Researcher at the DIJ.

Isaac Gagné is Principal Researcher at the German Institute for Japanese Studies and Managing Editor of *Contemporary Japan*. He is the author of “Dislocation, Social Isolation, and the Politics of Recovery in Post-Disaster Japan” (*Transcultural Psychiatry* 2020), “Religious Globalization and Reflexive Secularization in a Japanese New Religion” (*Japan Review*, 2017), and co-editor of *Japan through the lens of the Tokyo Olympics* (Routledge, 2020).

About:

The DIJ Study Group is a forum for scholars from all disciplines conducting research on contemporary or modern Japan. The event is open to all.

This session is organized by Isaac Gagné.

On-site Only Event:

On-site participation: please register via email to gagne@dijtokyo.org until August 5, 2025.

Venue:

DIJ Tokyo: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/access/>