

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group



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Human Rights Narratives in Japan

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Are human rights a shield to protect victims of human rights violations or are they a sword wielded by human rights lawyers to attack everyone disagreeing with their opinions? Do people in Japan care about human rights or are they just window-dressing for the international community? Language connected to human rights is essentially contested. This talk presents human rights narratives collected from various human rights actors in Japanese society. These narratives form the basis of human rights discourse in Japanese civil society, media, the legal landscape, academia, and politics.

As part of my PhD project “Human Rights in Contestation: Discursive Dynamics in the Japanese Diet”, this presentation aims to showcase the complexity of human rights discourse in Japan. It is based on expert interview data and field observations gathered during fieldwork. While the project’s time frame is set to start in the 1990s with the government pronouncing a “human rights decade”, the collected narratives set many different starting points of human rights. The study uses mixed methods to map the political discourse quantitatively and qualitatively to then trace back how discursive shifts occurred. While examining how human rights are articulated and strategically employed by politicians, I connect these findings to the academic fields of social movement studies, law, political science, philosophy, and cultural theory. This interdisciplinary approach helps with understanding human rights in contemporary Japanese society within in a world which increasingly puts pressure on liberal norms.

Johanna Fritzi Momm is a second year PhD researcher in the Graduate School of East Asian Studies at the Free University of Berlin specializing in human rights discourse in Japanese politics. She completed her Bachelor’s degree in Transcultural Studies at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf and earned her Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Japanese Studies at the University of Oxford. Johanna’s primary research interest lies in the dynamics of human rights discourses of Japanese society which she examines through an interdisciplinary lens. She previously studied at Chiba University and Keio University. Since February 2026, Johanna has been a PhD researcher at the DIJ Tokyo.

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 David M. Malitz.

This is a public event. Please be aware that audio-visual recordings may be made, stored, and published during and after the event.

Hybrid Event:

On-site participation: please register via email to malitz@dijtokyo.org until May 27, 2026.

Online participation: please register via our webpage.

Venue:

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