

Symposium Report Entangled Trajectories of Modernization: Medicine, Science, and Technology in Transwar East Asia, 17-18 September 2026.

On 17-18 September 2026, the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo hosted the international symposium “Entangled Trajectories of Modernization: Medicine, Science, and Technology in Transwar East Asia” on-site and online, jointly organized by Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus (DIJ Tokyo), Bernhard Leitner (Medical University of Vienna), and Nicolas Schillinger (University of Duisburg-Essen). The symposium was generously supported by the Toshiba International Foundation with additional funding from the German Centre for Research and Innovation Tokyo (DWIH Tokyo).

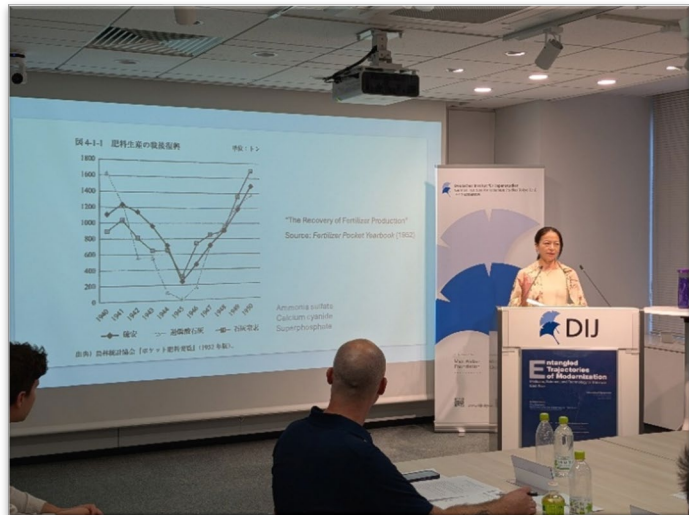
The symposium pursued three main objectives. First, it aimed to place discussions of Japan and its colonial history within a broader context of Japan’s relationship with Asia. Second, it sought to deepen scholarly understanding of postcolonial continuities and interdependencies in the development of science, technology, and medicine (STM) in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Third, it aimed to strengthen a comparative East Asian historiography of STM and to encourage interdisciplinary exchange on the long-term effects of colonial and postcolonial legacies.



The symposium opened with a welcome address by DIJ Director Franz Waldenberger, followed by opening remarks by Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus and Bernhard Leitner. The first panel, “Governing Populations: Eugenics and Biopolitics,” focused on Japan and colonial Korea. Jin-kyung Park (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies), examined how population

was understood and managed within the spatial and geopolitical framework of the Japanese Empire. Akira Hashimoto (Aichi Prefectural University) examined the Japanese National Eugenics Law of 1940 and its post-war legacies in Okinawa, while Jaehwan Hyun (Seoul National University) discussed the historical construction of the Zainichi population as a social and political category. Together, the talks highlighted the persistence of colonial ideas about population, classification, and social order beyond 1945.

The second panel, “Measuring Bodies: Anthropology and Its Legacies,” turned to Taiwan. Ping-Heng Chen (National Cheng Kung University), examined how anthropological knowledge and methods were developed through the study and collection of Indigenous Taiwanese material culture, including tattoos and drawings, while Harry Yi-Jui Wu (National Cheng Kung University) discussed the measurement and disciplining of bodies in colonial and post-war Taiwan. Their presentations showed how colonial forms of knowledge continued to influence later practices and institutions



The first day concluded with the keynote lecture by Hiromi Mizuno (University of Minnesota) on the concept of “Transwar,” using fertilizer production and circulation within the Japanese Empire as an example. While acknowledging factual ruptures, she questioned the idea of 1945 as a complete historical break. Her presentation demonstrated how economic and technological networks could continue across the transition from empire to the post-war period.



The second day began with the panel “Reconfiguring Empire: Science Diplomacy and Technical Cooperation”. John DiMoia (Seoul National University) discussed Korean medical exchange programs in developing countries, Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus (DIJ Tokyo) examined industrial and technical education in colonial and post-war Korea, and Nadin

Heé (Leipzig University) focused on the regional technical knowledge of Japanese tuna

fishermen in Japan and Taiwan. Together the presentations showed the movement of knowledge through national and historic borders.

The following panel, “Scientizing Male Bodies in War and Peace,” examined the relationship between bodies and military institutions. Sabine Frühstück (UC Santa Barbara) discussed changing perceptions of the male body in wartime and peacetime Japan, while Nicolas Schillinger (University of Duisburg-Essen) analyzed methods of measuring and examining male bodies in the Republican Chinese military. Both presentations showed how ideas about the body were shaped by scientific, military, and political imperatives.



The final panel, “Treating Empire: Medicine, the Body, and the Mind,” brought together three different approaches to medical history. Hoi-eun Kim (Texas A&M University) examined a Korean doctor’s attempt to link chili pepper consumption to female physical weakness, Bernhard Leitner (Medical University of Vienna) discussed Japanese-Austrian medical connections and knowledge circulation throughout Korea as well as Taiwan, and Akihito Suzuki (University of Tokyo) compared psychiatric care in Tokyo and rural areas. The panel showed the importance of scientific networks and differences in institutional practices.



Across the different panels, several themes emerged. The presentations repeatedly questioned the divisions between colonial, wartime, and post-war periods. Instead, they emphasized continuities in institutions, scientific practices and knowledge. The symposium also showed the importance of looking beyond national histories and

considering broader developments in the whole East Asian region in order to understand local developments. To further develop the findings of the symposium and share the results with a wider audience, a publication of selected papers as a double special issue is being planned.



The symposium received very positive feedback from the participants, who highlighted the quality of the papers, the smooth organization, and the friendly atmosphere of the event. Participants also appreciated the stimulating discussions, the opportunity to learn from the different contributions, and the chance to reconnect with colleagues and meet new scholars.