German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group

November 25, 2026, 6.30 pm (JST) / 10.30 am (CET)

Shinzō o Sasageyo! Contrasting Ideological Receptions of the Anime Series *Shingeki no Kyojin – Attack on Titan*

Violetta Janzen, Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf/DIJ Tokyo

In November 2021, Republican US Representative Paul Gosar shared an edited videoclip taken from the globally popular anime series *Shingeki no Kyojin – Attack on Titan* (2013–2023) to attack political opponents and to criticize immigration. This is just one example of how anime is increasingly used in non-Japanese polarized political discourse despite the fact that it's mostly read and marketed as a typically Japanese medium. *Attack on Titan* in particular sparked discussions around its ideological messages both in fandom and academia, as the initially generic *shōnen* anime narrative increasingly focused on more controversial topics such as racism, nationalism, and justifications of violence. Outside of Japan, critical readings of the series are often linked to its use of elements from Japanese and German history that provoke strong responses depending on the national and historical background of the audience. In Japan, however, its marketing and reception appear to be apolitical or even trivialized.

Drawing on fieldwork as well as materials from both Japanese industry and the fan community, the presentation focuses on the specific environment of the Japanese anime industry and the reception by Japanese audiences that builds on practices such as derivative works and non-narrative consumption. The aim is to elucidate the role that distinctive features of the Japanese contents industry play in both the national and international reception of anime as a potentially political form of media.

Violetta Janzen is a doctoral candidate and research associate at the Department of Modern Japanese Studies at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf. She completed her Bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies and her Master's degree in Japanese Studies at Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg. Her research focuses on Japanese animation, both in its historical and contemporary manifestations. She concentrates primarily on the consolidation of genres and tropes, reception and resulting fan discourses, and the internationalization of the medium under the brand of anime as a Japanese cultural asset. Since July 2026, Violetta has been a PhD Student 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 Nicole Marion Mueller.
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 mueller@dijtokyo.org until November 24, 2026.
Online participation: please register via our webpage.

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