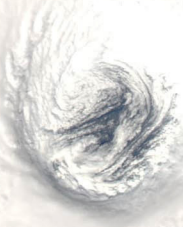
IN-EAST
INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EAST ASIAN STATECRAFT UNDER PRESSURE: RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION BETWEEN DOMESTIC CHALLENGES AND GLOBAL FORCES



Wed/Thu, November 11–12, 2026

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany,
Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST)

Venue: College for Social Sciences and Humanities
Lindenallee 39–41, 45127 Essen

UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG ESSEN

Offen im Denken

International Conference

EAST ASIAN STATECRAFT UNDER PRESSURE: RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION BETWEEN DOMESTIC CHALLENGES AND GLOBAL FORCES

November 11–12, 2026

Venue: College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Lindenallee 39–41, 45127 Essen

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany
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East Asia is experiencing one of the most consequential periods of transformation in decades. Global power shifts, the second Trump administration, China's rise to superpower status, and Russia's military and strategic aggression have put tremendous stress on the region, affecting its geopolitics, internal politics, economy, and society. At the same time, East Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific region have become sites of global importance, increasingly shaping global power structures, conflicts, and recalibrations. How East Asian democracies and autocratic states deal with external and internal stress, pressure, and threats will have different effects and repercussions that will affect the rest of the world in the medium and long term. This conference seeks to shed light on the rapidly evolving dynamics of destabilization, strategic adjustments, and resilience in China, Japan, Korea, and beyond by bringing together diverse perspectives and disciplines.

Please note that the schedule may change and check regularly for updates!

Wednesday, November 11, 2026

College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Essen

9:30 Welcome and Registration

10:00 Welcome Addresses and Introduction

Achim Goerres *Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences*
Axel Klein *Director IN-EAST*

10:15 Panel I: Climate Change and Energy Politics

Chair: **Markus Taube** *IN-EAST*

Andreas Löschel *Ruhr University Bochum*
Energy Security as a Driver of Energy and Climate Policy in China

Miranda Schreurs *Technical University of Munich*
Contrasting Chinese and Japanese Energy and Climate Policy Paths

Eva Sternfeld *Sino-German Agricultural Centre, Beijing (formerly)*
Black Cats – Green Mountains. Energy Security, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change: Challenges for Sustainable Development in China

12:00 Lunch break

13:00 Panel II: Securitization in the Asia-pacific and beyond

Chair: **Nele Noesselt** *IN-EAST*

Zhao Suisheng *University of Denver*
China as a Rule-maker amid the Crisis of the Post-WWII World Order

Hyung-Gu Lynn *University of British Columbia, Vancouver*
The Cubist State: Multi-Planar Sovereignty and North Korean Foreign Policy

Obert Hodzi *University of Liverpool*
Bandung 2.0? Asymmetric Solidarity and Strategic Autonomy in a Fractured Global Order

Xiaoli Guo *IN-EAST*
Enacting Responsibility and Unsettling Expectations in China's Great-Power Conduct

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 Panel III: Democracies under Pressure

Chair: **Hannes Mosler** *IN-EAST*

Guibourg Delamotte *French Institute of Oriental Studies (inalco), Paris*
Challenges to and Resilience of Democracy in Japan

Myungji Yang *University of Hawai'i, Honolulu*
South Korea's Reactionary Turn: Evangelicals, Seniors, and Young Men on the Right

17:15 Short Break

17:30 Keynote Lecture

Chair: **Flemming Christiansen** *IN-EAST*

Kerry Brown *King's College London*
tba

18:30 Wrap-up Day one

Thursday, November 12, 2026

College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Essen

9:30 Welcome and Registration

10.00 Panel IV: Statecraft and Labour Markets

Chair: **Axel Klein** *IN-EAST*

Stefan Heeb *IN-EAST*
Social Status Attribution Regimes in East Asia: Institutional Sorting, Legitimation Narratives, and the Vocational/Academic Divide

Monika Arnoštová *IN-EAST*
Mediating Crisis: The Role of Family, Gender, and State in Shaping Youth Futures in China

Georg Blind *IN-EAST*
Upgrade or Headhunt: The Unlikely Rebound of Regular Employment in Japan

Ardita Osmani *IN-EAST*
Selective Regulation in Cross-Border Labour Markets. The Case of Chinese Labour Migration to Italy

12.00 Lunch break

13:00 Panel V: Demographic Changes and Migration

Chair: **Judith Purkarthofer** *University of Duisburg-Essen*

Gracia Liu-Farrer *Waseda University, Tokyo*
Recruiting Workers, Restricting Settlers: Japan's Migration Policy Transition and Its Consequences

Myung Jin Hwang *Korea University, Seoul*
tba

Rachel Murphy *University of Oxford*
China's Care Challenges and Multi-layered Patchwork Improvisations under Accelerated Population Decline

Hyun Bang Shin *London School of Economics*
From Growth to Inheritance: Rethinking Gentrification under Demographic Shift in East Asia

15.30 Coffee break

16.00 Roundtable Discussion: Changing International Order

Eric Ballbach *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin*
Alexandra Sakaki *SWP Berlin*
Jörn-Carsten Gottwald *Ruhr University Bochum*
Moderator: Anna Shpakovskaya *IN-EAST Associate*

17.00 Farewell

ABSTRACTS

Panel I: Climate Change and Energy Politics

Energy Security as a Driver of Energy and Climate Policy in China

Andreas Löschel

tba

Contrasting Chinese and Japanese Energy and Climate Policy Paths

Miranda Schreurs

This presentation will contrast the climate and energy policies and programmatic trajectories of China and Japan and what these may mean for their longer term economic and environmental well-being and their contributions to global climate mitigation and environmental protection.

Black Cats – Green Mountains. Energy Security and Climate Change – Challenges for China's Sustainable Development amidst Global Crises

Eva Sternfeld

China's rise to become a leading economic power was accompanied by a massive increase in the use of energy—particularly fossil fuels—and the associated emission of greenhouse gases. As the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases—accounting for nearly 30% of global emissions—China is itself increasingly affected by the consequences of global warming. Unlike the current US administration, the Chinese government does not deny the existence of human-induced climate change or the necessity of climate policy. In the context of the 2015 Paris Agreement under the UN Climate Convention, China has set itself an ambitious goal by announcing plans to achieve climate neutrality by 2060.

The presentation examines China's energy and climate policies amidst global crises. The signals are contradictory: against the backdrop of a domestic environmental crisis and the aim to reduce reliance on energy imports and the related geopolitical vulnerability, significant investments have been made in expanding renewable energy and developing low-emission technologies. In this regard, China has not only caught up with the West technologically but has already emerged as the international technology leader for many products and is opening up new export markets. China holds a decisive advantage over international competitors here: having recognized early on the strategic value of establishing the entire value chain required for the low-carbon energy transition. From a geopolitical perspective a key advantage lies in the country's vast reserves of essential raw materials such as rare earths, molybdenum, and silicon. In recent years the extraction and processing of raw materials for clean energies have been systematically expanded. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the country will succeed in reducing its heavy reliance on coal. Furthermore, forecasts indicate that China will remain the world's largest importer of oil and gas for at least another 20 years.

Panel II: Securitization in the Asia-pacific and beyond

China as a Rule-maker amid the Crisis of the Post-WWII World Order

Suisheng Zhao

This article examines China's emerging role as a rule-maker amid the crisis of the post–World War II order. It argues that U.S. abandonment of longstanding institutions, alliances, and liberal norms has created unprecedented opportunities for Beijing to reshape global governance. China has expanded its influence through norm-making, institutional entrepreneurship, reinterpretation of international rules, and engagement with the Global South. Yet these advances do not amount to the emergence of Pax Sinica. China's coercive practices, limited provision of global public goods, failure to articulate universally attractive values, and persistent rivalry with the United States instead contribute to a fragmented order of unbounded power politics.

The Cubist State: Multi-Planar Sovereignty and North Korean Foreign Policy

Hyung-Gu Lynn

How does a structurally constrained state execute radical foreign policy reversals without domestic ideological collapse? Mainstream International Relations models North Korea through single-perspective frameworks—unitary rationalist balancing or monolithic autocracy—failing to explain Pyongyang's simultaneous deployment of contradictory postures. Rejecting sequential two-level games, this paper conceptualizes the DPRK as a "Cubist State" practicing "multi-planar sovereignty." Grounded in a content analysis of specialized North Korean serials (Kulloja, Chongchi Bopryul Yongu, Kyongje Yongu), the presentation examines how the regime partitions discourse into vertically compartmentalized facets. This strategic siloing absorbs external shocks, allowing elite coordination while preserving ideological immutability across domestic audiences.

Bandung 2.0? Asymmetric Solidarity and Strategic Autonomy in a Fractured Global Order

Obert Hodzi

The US foreign policy and strategies under the Trump administration have exposed fractures in the current global order. The combined effect of US unilateralism, Western racialised power dynamics, and Chinese dominance mean that East Asia and Africa face parallel existential pressures. Rejecting visions of Africa as a passive arena for external statecraft, this paper argues for a revived "Bandung 2.0" solidarity anchored in mutual agency. Unlike the 1955 alliance, modern solidarity operates within a deeply contested, asymmetric Global South where Beijing exercises dominance and Washington proves unreliable. Transcending outdated ideological notions, this paper assesses how East Asian middle powers and African states must co-construct pragmatic coalitions to resist superpower coercion, safeguard strategic autonomy, and shape an emerging post-hegemonic order.

Enacting Responsibility and Unsettling Expectations in China's Great-Power Conduct

Xiaoli Guo

Great-power standing carries inherited expectations of responsibility, but cannot fully determine their fulfilment. The enactment of inherited responsibilities may itself unsettle established understandings of appropriate great-power conduct. Drawing on role theory, this paper examines this tension through China's initiatives. It argues that seemingly contradictory enactments of great-power responsibility may not only reflect strategic competition or appear to deviate from inherited expectations, but may also be political manifestations of the ongoing reproduction of an established great-power role. Assessing China's conduct solely against inherited benchmarks leaves open how its enactments participate in reproducing the substantive role content upon which those benchmarks rest.

Keynote

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Kerry Brown

Panel III: Democracies under Pressure

South Korea's Reactionary Turn: Evangelicals, Seniors, and Young Men on the Right

Myungji Yang

South Korean democracy has long been considered stable and vibrant, characterized by peaceful transfers of power and active social movements. However, the pressures facing the democratic system have intensified in the wake of Yoon Suk-yeol's failed self-coup attempt in 2024. In this talk, I focus on how the radicalized right-wing party and its supporters—including evangelicals, senior citizens, and young men—contest democratic norms and values. Drawing on the historical legacies, political actors, and geopolitical contexts that have shaped the arena of far-right politics, this talk provides insights into how the far right has built political coalitions and developed its tactics over an extended period. By doing so, it seeks to deepen our understanding of the roots of South Korea's current democratic regression.

Challenges to and Resilience of Democracy in Japan

Guibourg Delamotte

Takaichi Sanae won her party's headship by a narrow majority in October 2025, but her position as Japan's prime minister was strengthen by a landslide victory in February 2026. The ensuing strength of the party created some unease and contributed to a shift to the right of Japanese politics as the LDP abandoned its longstanding center-right coalition partner for a more rightwing one. In addition to confirming the ability of the LDP to regain strength, the February 2026 Lower house elections confirmed that immigration, a longtime issue of European politics, had become a concern for the Japanese electorate; that candidates doing well were those whose

aptly used social media. Hence Japanese democracy follows international trends and for similar reasons – the lack of growth, inflation, a sense of being disregarded on the part of the lower and middle classes, doubts on the viability of social security networks such as the pensions system… International factors create further concerns – a rising China, a less reliable United States – force a reassessment of the minimal defence posture and a broadening of security partnerships. Against this backdrop, this presentation will centre on three main questions: is executive leadership becoming more authoritarian, how do Japanese citizens assess their democracy, what sources of resilience does it show?

Panel IV: Statecraft and Labor Markets

Just Hierarchy? Status Attribution Regimes in Japan and China

Stefan Heeb

Why do high-skill industrial societies differ so fundamentally in how they justify educational hierarchy? This paper develops the concept of Social Status Attribution Regimes to address this variation. A regime comprises a normative narrative compound, an institutional sorting architecture, and the patterns of legitimation and contestation that result. I distinguish egalitarian-meritocratic and hierarchist-meritocratic compounds, and illustrate the framework through Japan and China. The paper argues that the distribution of narrative burden – where hierarchy requires active defence, where it is accepted with justification, where it is taken for granted – is explained by the interaction between compound and architecture.

Mediating Crisis: The Role of Family, Gender, and State in Shaping Youth Futures in China

Monika Arnoštová

Since 2023, Chinese youth have been facing unemployment driven by economic slowdown, aging, pandemic policies, and education-industry mismatches. This fuels "involution"—intensifying competition with shrinking returns—eroding faith in social mobility. In Shanghai, youth respond with platform work, "lying flat," further study, or becoming "full-time children," trading care for support. Based on 30 in-depth interviews, this study analyses how family resources—financial, housing, emotional—mediate precarity and shape individual choices, while mostly reinforcing filial norms. Gendered expectations persist, and young men and women navigate their futures differently. State policies on education and labor markets are mediated through family networks and cultural values.

Upgrade or Headhunt: The Unlikely Rebound of Regular Employment in Japan

Georg Blind

The research sheds light on two phenomena long considered „absent" or „exceptional" in the Japanese labor market. Combining data from the Labor Force and the Employment Status surveys, this research tries to size the phenomenon beyond these indications and correcting for a number of factors, including the absolute growth of non-regular employment. To the extent

possible it also delves into providing evidence on the purported wage loss associated with mid-career job changes within the regular segment of the Japanese labor market.

Statecraft by Omission? Chinese Labour Emigration to Italy and the Private Governance of a Cross-Border Labour Market

Ardita Osmani

How do states shape cross-border labour markets through selective regulation? This paper examines Chinese labour migration to Italy, where China's regulatory framework for licensed labour export does not extend equivalent protections to self-financed emigration, while Italy lacks a bilateral labour-migration agreement with China. Drawing on Bachrach and Baratz's (1963) concept of non-decisions, the paper investigates the political consequences of these regulatory boundaries without presuming deliberate state withdrawal. It compares Chinese labour-export regulations with the country's 2026 exit-entry rules, which extend oversight to emigration intermediaries in response to security rather than labour pressures, then analyses 153 job postings on Huarenjie alongside fieldwork during labour inspections in Italy. The findings show how labour matching, employment-linked housing and linguistic requirements shape access to work through dispersed private infrastructures, without a corresponding framework of labour governance and protection.

Panel V: Demographic Changes and Migration

Recruiting Workers, Restricting Settlers: Japan's Migration Policy Transition and Its Consequences

Gracia Liu-Farrer

Japan is admitting foreign workers into manual and service occupations on an unprecedented scale. At the same time, it is making permanent settlement harder to obtain and easier to revoke. This article argues that the transition is creating a de facto guestworker regime, which recruits labour widely while treating membership as exceptional and reversible. We draw on policy analysis and fieldwork in the Indonesia–Japan migration corridor (2022–2026) to examine the regime's consequences for migrants' trajectories, for Japan's use of the skills it trains, and for its long-term demographic needs.

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Myung Jin Hwang

China's Care Challenges and Multi-layered Patchwork Improvisations Under Accelerated Population Decline

Rachel Murphy

From Growth to Inheritance: Rethinking Gentrification under Demographic Shift in East Asia

Hyun Bang Shin

Until recently, gentrification in East Asia has been largely discussed in the context of population growth and housing assetisation. This paper aims to reconceptualise gentrification beyond growth-centred urbanism. Building on my previous work on gentrification, speculative urbanisation and intergenerational housing in East Asia, I ask what happens when cities shaped earlier by property-led accumulation confront demographic contraction that unfolds unevenly across geographies. This paper suggests that geographies of gentrification may be reconfigured as the importance of inheritance, family transfers, and accumulated property wealth increases. The paper shifts the analytical lens from growth to inheritance, examining how inherited housing assets may reproduce socio-spatial inequalities across generations and geographies while reshaping the politics of neighbourhood change amid ageing and population decline.

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